

# A History of India

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*In Two Books*

BOOK

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## Preface

India is a cradle of human civilisation. Its culture is closely linked with that of many other peoples and has exerted a significant influence upon their development. Despite centuries of this mutual enrichment India has maintained its original and striking individuality. The achievements of ancient and medieval India in science, literature and art over thousands of years have inspired the creative thought of nations far and wide. Hinduism and Buddhism, that originated in India, and other religious and philosophical teachings which evolved on this foundation, were to influence not merely the development of many Eastern civilisations, but also social thought in many other parts of the world.

Despite colonial oppression, which lasted for close on two hundred years, the people of India succeeded in upholding the traditions of their cultural heritage, distinguished in particular by the lofty ideals of humanism and a profound love of peace. In more recent times the culture and science of contemporary India have been developing on the basis of an original synthesis of Indian cultural traditions and the democratic principles of European culture.

The outstanding Indian writer, musician and teacher Rabindranath Tagore was and is held dear by the whole of the human race.

The history of India in the last several hundred years is that of a long and heroic struggle waged by several generations in the name of liberation from colonial and feudal oppression. The names of outstanding thinkers and politicians who headed the triumphant advance of the national revolution—Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru—stand out in the ranks of those who fought for India's freedom.

India's emergence as an independent nation in 1947 marked a new era in the history of its people. The country was then faced by a task of historic proportions: it had to overcome the survivals of its colonial past and choose a path leading into the future. The historical evolution of modern India is for the most part characterised by steady economic, social, political and cultural progress that is paving the way for profound change in the destiny of this great country.

Scientific analysis of the history and culture of India began at the end of the 18th century, when Europe once again "discovered" India. Since then a variety of schools and trends have grown up in Indology. Many works on India written by West European scholars are too Europe-orientated and various chapters of Indian history are approached in the same way as phenomena of European culture or ancient civilisations closer and more familiar to Europe.

In India itself great interest was shown in the study of the country's history and culture at the turn of the century, as the movement for national independence gained ground. Indian scholars made tremendous strides in the study of their country's history at this time, subjecting to scientific analysis many interesting works of literature and historical source materials. It was they who for the first time presented the history of modern India as the history of a struggle for independence.

An important contribution to this work was made by Russian Indologists. Prominent among them were I. Minayev, F. Shcherbatskoy, and S. Oldenburg, whose works constitute examples of outstanding scholarship. The Indologists of the Russian school have always shown deep respect for the cultural heritage of the peoples of India, and adopted an objective, strictly scientific approach to their study of the country's history and culture.

After the October Revolution of 1917 a Marxist school of Indology grew up: prominent scholars at the early stages included I. Reisner, V. Balabushevich, A. Dyakov, A. Osipov and N. Goldberg.

The interest shown in India grows from year to year in the Soviet Union. This can be accounted for both by the role which India played and continues to play in the world's historical development, and also by the broad political, economic and cultural ties which have grown up between the USSR and India. A deep affection for the peoples of India and a sense of international solidarity lead Soviet men and women to acquaint themselves in detail with India past and present. In the last ten years alone a large number of academic and general works on India's history and culture have appeared and many works by Indian writers have been translated into Russian.

Soviet historians compiled and published a four-volume *History of India* in 1959-1969 which was well received in the country concerned. This work, some of whose authors and editors have contributed to the present study as well, has been drawn on for this new *History of India* in two books. At the same time use has also been made of the latest research into Indian history carried out by scholars from both the Soviet Union and many other countries.

It is hoped that this book will provide the reader with a deeper knowledge of India and the history and culture of its peoples, and thus promote friendly relations between India and the Soviet Union.

The authors of this work are as follows: G. Bongard-Levin (Part I), K. Antonova (Part II and Part III as far as the section entitled "India during the Transition to Imperialism") and G. Kotovsky (the remainder of Part III and Part IV).

## INDIA IN THE KUSHANA AND GUPTA PERIODS

### NORTH-WESTERN INDIA IN THE FIRST CENTURY B.C. AND THE FIRST CENTURY A.D.

Already in the later years of the Mauryan empire many regions of North-Western India had become virtually independent of the central administration. Later, in a number of these north-western territories power was seized by minor Indo-Greek kings, of whose rule there are only fragmentary records available.

Among the numerous Indo-Greek rulers, one figure stood out in particular, that of Menander, who went down in Indian tradition by the name of Milinda. In the Buddhist text *Milinda-panho* (second century A.D.) reference is made to a disputation between King Milinda and the Buddhist philosopher, monk Nagasena. Some coins from Menander's kingdom have the *chakra* (or wheel)—the Buddhist symbol of power, which presumably means that the king either adopted Buddhist teaching or patronised its adherents. The capital of the state in question was Sagala (modern Sialkot). Menander's kingdom incorporated Gandhara, Arachosia and some parts of the Punjab. As mentioned earlier, the Greek army, by all appearances during the reign of Menander, advanced into Eastern India as far as the approaches to Pataliputra—the capital of the Shunga dynasty then in power.

In the first century B.C. the Iranian tribes of the Shakas (the Sai tribes in Chinese sources) made their way into North-Western India from Central Asia. Initially the Shakas, after encountering the Indo-Greek dynasties, came under the latter's domination, but later they set up their own Indo-Shaka states. One of the most famous Indo-Shaka rulers was King Maues who appears to have ruled in the mid-first century B.C. He established himself in Gandhara and his rule extended over the Swat valley and possibly part of Kashmir. Azes, his heir, extended his domains still further and bestowed upon himself the title of the "Great King of Kings". This state incorporated parts of Arachosia. In the first century A.D. Indo-Parthian dynasties appear on the scene and they were to wage a fierce struggle for supremacy against the Indo-Greek and Indo-Shaka rulers. The Indo-Parthian king Gondophares succeeded in asserting his power over Gandhara, Arachosia and part of Drangiana often known as Shakastan, i.e., the land of the Shakas (modern Seistan).

## **The Formation of the Kushana Empire**

Under the Kushana dynasty small and fragmented state formations torn by bitter rivalry were replaced by a great empire which incorporated not only regions of Northern and North-Western India, but also of Central Asia, and of what is now Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Initially the Kushana kingdom incorporated parts of Bactria within Central Asia. Judging by Chinese sources, it was Yueh-chi tribes that invaded Bactria from the East in the second century B.C. and set up five domains. Later the Kushanas referred to as a Kuei-shuang in the Chinese chronicles came to dominate the others. Classical writers also refer to tribes that came in from the East and conquered Bactria.

Strabo mentions that these tribes won Bactria from the Greeks. At the time of the Kushana tribes' invasion Bactria was a highly advanced country with firmly established traditions of statehood and a well-developed culture. The people of this territory spoke the Bactrian tongue (which belonged to the Iranian group of languages) and they had a writing as well, derived from Greek. The Kushanas adopted these traditions of the Bactrians who led a settled life, although the traditions of the nomadic tribes continued to make a significant contribution to the shaping of Kushana culture. The question as to the origins of the Kushanas remains most obscure and is still fiercely debated in academic circles.

In recent years a variety of hypotheses have been put forward, for example, the Yueh-chi have been linked with the Tokharis—tribes from Inner Asia, who had conquered the Bactrians but had lost their language. Alternatively it has been suggested that the Kushana people emerged in Bactria (this suggestion would call into question the link between the Kushanas and the Yueh-chi). One of the Kushana kings at the end of the first century B.C., Heraus, referred to himself, judging by the coins of that period, as Kushan Heraus.

Under the Kushana ruler Kujula Kadphises (referred to in Chinese chronicles as Ch'iu-chiu-chuch) the Kushana state came to include Arachosia, part of Kashmir and some regions of Parthia. A large number of coins from Kadphises' reign have been found around Kabul, which indicates that this area was also part of the Kushana empire. Initially Kadphises had to acknowledge the authority of the Indo-Greek kings: some of the coins of his reign bear the portrait of the Indo-Greek king, Hermaeus, on one side, while on the other the name of Kadphises is written in Kharoshthi script. Later he was able to attain full independence, and the coins of his realm were minted bearing only the name of Kadphises, "King of Kings". During the reign of his son, Kadphises II or Vima Kadphises, the Kushana state already incorporated parts of the lower reaches of the Indus. The Kushanas were also able to push further east. It is possible that by this time they were ruling over parts of Eastern India even as far as Varanasi.



Vima Kadphises introduced an important fiscal reform, namely, the use of gold coins equal in value to the Roman aurei, which circulated within the confines of the Kushana state. This step can probably be regarded as the result of Roman influence. The seizure of strictly Indian territories had made it necessary for the Kushana rulers to take into account local traditions which dominated in the state administration throughout the empire. This explains why some of the coins minted during the reign of Vima Kadphises bear the god Shiva (sometimes with the sacred bull Nandin, one of the main figures associated with Shiva).

### **Kanishka**

The Kushana empire reached the height of its power during the reign of Kanishka, one of the most famous of all rulers of ancient India. Apart from coins and a small amount of epigraphic evidence there are few dated or contemporary sources of information relating to Kanishka's reign, although there are references to him and his activities in many of the late-Buddhist legends and tales. It was under Kanishka that the power of the Kushanas was extended as far as parts of Bihar and into Central India as far as the river Narbada.

During Kanishka's reign the Kushanas asserted their power in Saurashtra and Kathiawar, although the Western Kshatrapas (rulers of the provinces of Western India) were not completely under the power of the Kushanas. Chinese chronicles tell of the Kushanas' war against China over parts of Eastern Turkestan. Some sources imply that the Kushana troops even succeeded in penetrating far into these territories, although it is not known how long the Kushana kings were in power there. One thing is clear though, that under King Kanishka the Kushana Empire became one of the strongest powers of the ancient world, on a par with China, Rome and Parthia. At that time ties with Rome were close: it is possible that the reference in classical writings to the effect that there was an Indian embassy in Rome during the reign of Emperor Trajan (in the year 99 A.D.) applies to the Kushanas.

Chinese and Indian sources present Kanishka as a true adherent of Buddhism and it is with his name that the convocation of the Buddhist Council in Kashmir is linked (the so-called Fourth Buddhist Council). It is possible that Kanishka did indeed support Buddhism, but his actual policy was one of religious tolerance. This is borne out by the coins of his reign on which are depicted Indian, Hellenistic and Zoroastrian divinities. Under Kanishka Buddhism did not become a state religion, and a representation of Buddha is to be found only a few times on the numerous coins minted during Kanishka's reign.

During this time the Bactrian language became increasingly important and eventually was adopted throughout the state; the Bactrian script was also developed (on the basis of the Greek script). It came to oust the Kharoshthi script on coins too. A few years ago a large inscription in Bactrian, dating from the reign of Kanishka, was found in Surkh-Kotal, in Northern Afghanistan. In the inscription reference is made to the erection of a sanctuary, possibly the Kushanas' dynastic acropolis.

One of the most complex questions connected with this empire is that of chronology, including the specification of the dates for Kanishka's reign. Scholars have named different dates: 78, 103, 110, 144, 248, and even 278 A.D., in other words these hypothetical dates range over a period of two centuries. At the present time the most convincing of the attempts to date the "Kanishka era" places it in the first quarter of the second century A.D.

### **Kanishka's Heirs and the Fall of the Kushana Empire**

The most famous of Kanishka's successors were Huvishka and Vasudeva. During their reigns the Kushanas paid particular attention to the Indian territories in the Ganges valley. It became more and more difficult for them to assert their power over the North-Western provinces. By this stage intensive Indianisation of the Kushanas was in progress, they were imbibing Indian traditions and engaging in very close contacts with the local population. King Vasudeva was an adherent of the Shiva cult. A large number of Vasudeva inscriptions have been found in the neighbourhood of Mathura which by this time had begun to play a special role in the political and cultural life of the empire.

Already during Vasudeva's reign signs of the empire's incipient decline were to be observed. His successors had to wage a fierce struggle against both the strong kingdom of the Sassanians and local dynasties which had asserted themselves in various parts of India. The Kushanas found themselves obliged to recognise as independent the Nagas, the ruling dynasty in Mathura, and the Kaushambi kings. They also had to relinquish those parts of Central India which had once been incorporated in their empire. The fiercest struggle of all was that against the Sassanians of Iran in the middle of the third century A.D., after which the Western regions of the Kushana empire were made part of the Sassanian realm under Shapur I (241-272 A.D.). In a famous inscription of Shapur I (dating from 262 A.D.) that has been preserved in three versions—middle-Persian, Parthian and Greek—this particular ruler is referred to as "King of Kings of Iran and non-Iran" who ruled over the lands of the Kushanas stretching as far as Purushapura (Peshawar) right up to the borders of Kash (Kashgar), Sogdiana and Shash (Tashkent). However, at that period

the Sassanian ruler of the Kushana territories had not as yet, it seems, been appointed; it was somewhat later in the last quarter of the fourth century that special Kushana-Sassanian coins came to be minted and put into circulation by the Sassanian governors in the Kushana subject territories.

By the end of the Kushana era the only territories under their rule were those of Gandhara. Later almost all the Indian possessions of the Kushanas were incorporated into the Gupta empire.

### **The Kushana Pantheon and Cultural Advance**

The Kushana period was to leave its imprint on the historical and cultural development of many parts of the ancient world. Diverse peoples had been brought together within the confines of a single empire, common traditions had grown up within that framework and close ties had developed not only between different parts of the Kushana realm but also with Rome, the countries of South-East Asia and the Far East. Kushana culture attained maturity on a basis of the synthesis of diverse traditions, although certain of the local schools and trends were preserved. The finest of classical traditions were also adopted as part of the common heritage.

Recent excavations by Soviet archeologists in Central Asia have brought to light important material concerning the development in that area of local schools of architecture and sculpture. A prominent role in Kushana art was that played by the Bactrian school that was to exert an influence on Kushana art as a whole.

The ethnic and cultural diversity of the population of the Kushana empire is reflected in the Kushana pantheon, well known thanks to the coins from this era. Particularly good examples are found on the coins from the reigns of Kanishka and Huvishka, on which three groups of gods are prominent—Iranian, Hellenistic and Indian. Among the Iranian divinities represented are the god Mitra, the goddess of fertility Ardokhsho, the Moon-god (Mao), the god of war, Verethragna, and the supreme god, Ahuramazda. The Hellenistic deities represented were Hephaestus, Selene, Helios, Heracles. The most popular of the Indian gods were Shiva, Mahasena and Skandakumara.

This combination of gods reflected the formation of cultural traditions common to the whole of the Kushana empire and at the same time the policy of religious tolerance pursued by the kings concerned. Even after the fall of the empire many of these common traditions and links between parts of the former empire endured. The legacy of the Kushana era left an indelible mark on the subsequent development of many peoples of the East.

## The Formation of the Gupta Empire

After the fall of the Kushana empire there followed a long period of political fragmentation which lasted until the beginning of the fourth century A.D. After that a powerful new empire, that of the Guptas, began to take shape.

Up until then rulers of the Kushana dynasty had retained their hold over their small possessions in the Western Punjab; in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Malva, Kshatrapas were in control, there were a number of small state formations in the Ganges valley, including some republican ones. Magadha had seen a chain of dynasties but it continued to play a significant part in the economic and cultural life of Northern India.

As in the Mauryan age, so once again at the beginning of the fourth century A.D., Magadha became the centre of a new political unit, providing the core of the powerful Gupta empire. Very little is known of the early rulers of the Gupta dynasty. The founder of the dynasty was Sri Gupta who bore the titles *raja* and *maharaja*, but, as can be gleaned from certain Gupta inscriptions, the history of the dynasty really starts with King Ghatotkacha, Gupta's son. Unfortunately, the original borders of the Gupta possessions are not known. A number of historians feel that these must have coincided with the borders of Magadha, while others include parts of present-day West Bengal as well. The vagueness of the solutions suggested for this question is the result of the lack of precise epigraphic data. One of the main written sources available is the writing of the Chinese pilgrim, I Tsing.

Consolidation of the Gupta empire began in the reign of Chandragupta I, who adopted a title still more magnificent—*Maharajadhiraja* (Great King of Kings). The famous Allahabad inscription made by his son Samudragupta states that the king was the son of a "daughter of the Lichchhavis", in other words, it informs us that Chandragupta's wife came from the Lichchhavis. Ever since the Magadha era the Lichchhavis had been one of the leading forces in the political life of ancient India. It would appear that this republican union retained its power in the reign of the early Gupta kings. The alliance with the Lichchhavis must have contributed towards the consolidation of Gupta power. References to the matrimonial alliance with the Lichchhavis are not only to be gleaned from Samudragupta's inscription. On the gold coins of Chandragupta's reign we find depicted side by side with the king his Lichchhavi wife. Chandragupta's marriage to Kumaradevi from the Lichchhavis probably brought with it territorial gains as well: both states could come together to form a united empire under the Gupta kings.

The beginning of Chandragupta's reign and likewise the Gupta era is held to date from 320 A.D. However certain scholars regard that year as the date of Samudragupta's accession to the throne.

## Samudragupta and the Consolidation of the Empire

More detailed information is available with regard to the reign of Samudragupta. The Allahabad inscription, composed by the court poet Harishena in praise of Samudragupta's spectacular victories, enlists the names of kings and countries defeated by the Gupta ruler. Samudragupta succeeded in conquering nine kings of Aryavarta (in the Ganges valley) and twelve kings from Dakshinapatha, a region of Southern India. The territories of the states in Aryavarta were annexed to the Gupta empire. In the inscription mention is also made of two kings of the Naga dynasty, rulers of Ahichchhatra. It is very difficult to locate with any precision the other conquered territories, and this question is the subject of controversy in academic circles. Samudragupta's military activities were concentrated in the territories adjacent to his empire, in particular those in the Ganges valley. In the inscription there is also a reference to the Gupta king's seizure of the "forest kingdoms" which would appear to have been tribal alliances in the valleys of the Narbada and the Mahanadi.

Samudragupta's southern campaign was equally successful. First of all he defeated the king of southern Koshala, Mahendra, and then the rulers of the region now known as Orissa in the vicinity of the river Godavari, the Pallava king Vishnugopa, whose seat of power was Kanchi. The other areas mentioned in the inscription have not yet been identified.

The southern territories do not appear to have been incorporated into the empire; however they were regarded as subject territories insofar as they had to pay tribute to the conqueror. Certain other republican unions in Western and North-Western India were also subject territories of the Gupta empire: the Yaudheyas, the Malavas, the Madras and the Arjunayanas.

Relations between Samudragupta and both the Western Kshatrapas and the later rulers of the Kushana dynasty still ruling over the Western Punjab and some parts of Afghanistan were delicate ones. In the Allahabad inscription there is a reference to the Guptas' sovereignty over the Kshatrapas and the Kushanas. It would seem that Samudragupta had established some control over these territories, although the Kshatrapas and the Kushana kings had not relinquished their independence at that stage.

A revealing clue in these matters is the total absence of Kshatrapa coins for the years 332-348 and 351-360 A.D., which would seem to indicate at least temporary subordination to the Guptas. Gupta coins were in circulation on the territory of the Western Kshatrapas at that time. Later Rudrasena III, ruler of the Western Kshatrapas, restored his state to its former power for a time, while Simhasena even assumed the title "Great Kshatrapa".

Samudragupta maintained close ties with Sri Lanka. Tradition has it that the Ceylonese king Meghavarna (352-379 A.D.) sent an embassy

to Samudragupta asking for permission to build a cloister in India for Ceylonese monks. Samudragupta granted secret permission, and near the holy tree, Bodhi Vriksha, a Buddhist monastery seems to have been built.

During Samudragupta's reign the Gupta empire became one of the largest in the East. Its influence spread and close ties were established with many other states. Not without reason did the court poet Harishena write his eulogy of the valour and might of his king, who, in the words of the inscription, subdued the world. This assessment made by the court poet of old had considerable influence on many modern scholars who tended to idealise Samudragupta and described him, as did Vincent A. Smith, as the "Indian Napoleon", an outstanding individual possessed of remarkable qualities.

### **Chandragupta Vikramaditya**

Judging by epigraphical data Samudragupta ruled until 380 A.D., and the throne then passed to his son Chandragupta II, who ruled up until 413 or 415 A.D. According to the play *Devichandraguptam* by Vishakhadatta (of which only fragments have been preserved), Chandragupta II came to power after a fierce struggle with his brother Ramagupta. As made clear in the play, Chandragupta owed his success in this struggle to his victory over the Western Kshatrapas. This is borne out by epigraphical and numismatic evidence. The inscriptions do not describe the various stages of the campaign against the Kshatrapas, but there is reference to a visit paid to Malwa by Chandragupta's ministers and military commanders. At the beginning of the fifth century, coins, issued by Chandragupta II, found their way to the territory of the Western Kshatrapas; they resembled, as it were, the coins of former Kshatrapa rulers. This would point to the seizure by the Guptas of the territories of the Western Kshatrapas and their annexation. Moreover during his western campaign Chandragupta II also conquered some other parts of Western India, including the seaboard region. This brought the Guptas important trade centres and extended their links with overseas countries including those in the West.

On the basis of an inscription made at the behest of King Chandra on the famous Iron Pillar in Delhi, some historians assume that Chandragupta II (whom they identify with Chandra) extended his empire even as far as Balkh, but this hypothesis has not as yet been adequately established. During the reign of Chandragupta II relations with the Vakatakas—a powerful dynasty in the Western Deccan and Central India—deteriorated considerably. In an effort to secure his empire's southern and western borders Chandragupta II concluded a matrimonial alliance with the Vakatakas by giving his daughter in marriage to the king of the Vakatakas. The Naga state also seems to

have retained some degree of power and independence in that period, although Samudragupta, according to his inscription, had defeated the kings of that dynasty. Presumably Chandragupta II hoped to ease the struggle with the Western Kshatrapas counting on the support of the Vakatakas and the Nagas.

The coins of the period in question show that a fiscal reform was introduced under Chandragupta II. His predecessors had only made provision for the circulation of gold coins, while now silver and copper ones were introduced. On the reverse of the silver coins minted in Chandragupta II's reign the holy bird Garuda is depicted. Garuda is also shown on copper coins minted by that Gupta king, which clearly indicates that Chandragupta II was an adherent of Vaishnavism. This is also borne out by one of the epithets associated with the king—Paramabhadragavata (most worthy follower of the god Bhagavata).

The figure of Chandragupta II is one of the most popular in Indian history; to him was bestowed the name Vikramaditya (Sun of Prowess). The works of many outstanding writers, poets and scholars are traditionally linked with his reign. In Indian academic writing today the reign of Chandragupta II is often called the golden age of the Guptas.

After Chandragupta II died his son Kumaragupta came to the throne; in his reign, which lasted from 415 to 455 A.D., no events of outstanding importance were recorded. He adhered to the cult of Shiva. The god Kartikeya (Shiva's son) astride a peacock was depicted on the gold coins of his reign. A peacock was also depicted on the silver coins of his reign in place of Garuda. The prevailing peace was disrupted soon after Kumaragupta's death, and his successor Skandagupta found himself obliged to wage a bitter struggle against the Huns and the Ephthalites, whose tribes invaded India.

### **The Huns and the Ephthalites and the Fall of the Gupta Empire**

This union of tribes that had formerly inhabited Inner and Central Asia became very powerful in the fifth century, when it loomed as a threatening rival of Sassanid Iran and the last rulers of the Kushana dynasty. The Ephthalites succeeded initially in conquering the petty kingdoms in the western territories of what had once been the powerful Kushana empire, and then they gained spectacular victories over the rulers of Sassanid Iran. Later they invaded North-Western India and captured Gandhara. At that time (approximately 457-460 A.D.) the first clash between the Guptas and the Huns and Ephthalites took place. In one of the Gupta inscriptions there is a reference to the victory of Skandagupta over the Huns. Although these successes were short-lived, their significance was considerable,

especially if we take into account the terrible extent of the destruction which the Ephthalite army left in its wake. The western detachments of the Huns were scoring victories over Roman troops and laying waste parts of Western Europe. This war caused the Guptas financial difficulties; they were obliged to reduce the gold content of the coins and cut down on the number of variations to be found in each of the coins circulated.

While Skandagupta's heirs were in power, strong drives for separatism took place and certain of the more distant provinces began to aspire towards independence of the central administration. During the reign of King Budhagupta, for instance, the governor of Kathiawar assumed the title *maharaja* (Great King), not a very elevated title at the time, instead of *senapati* (military commander), and actually became an independent ruler though officially he was still a vassal of the Guptas. The kings of Southern Kosala and the Narbada region were by this time dependent rulers only in name. Bengal gained independence. All these developments brought about a situation in which the empire was no longer united.

A powerful blow was dealt at the empire by the new invasions of the Huns and the Ephthalites. Under the Ephthalite king Toramana (490-515 A.D.) the Huns succeeded in penetrating deep into India, seizing Sind, parts of Rajasthan and Western India. Toramana's heir Mihirakula initially scored a number of victories over the Guptas; later the Gupta king Narasimhagupta (or Baladitya) nevertheless routed his army in a decisive battle and Mihirakula was obliged to withdraw once again into North-Western India, retaining as he did so only parts of Gandhara and certain areas of the Punjab (the capital of which was then the town of Sakala—modern Sialkot). In 533 A.D. Yashodharman, the ruler of Malwa, defeated the Huns and the Ephthalites, but by this time the unity of the Gupta empire was already in shreds. Making the most of the Gupta empire's weakened state, Yashodharman gained independence. Apart from Malwa other regions also became independent. In Kanauj, for example, the Maukhari dynasty was established.

For some time yet the Guptas were able to assert their power over Magadha and other territories, but now all that remained were weak descendants of once great kings. These rulers came to be known as the later Guptas. Such was the fall of one of the greatest empires of the ancient world.

#### THE WESTERN KSHATRAPAS AND THE SATAVAHANAS

In the Deccan and in Southern India in the first centuries A.D. major processes of class formation were at work and large states were taking shape. Communications between north and south were increasing, and also between the southern states and Rome, on the



one hand, and the countries of South-East Asia, on the other. At that period the Satavahana empire was still playing a leading role. After the state of Kalinga had fallen the main rivals of the Satavahanas were the Kshatrapas—descendants of those Shaka tribes who had settled in the lower reaches of the Indus and in Kathiawar as early as the first century B.C. Gradually certain of these tribes rose to prominence, namely the Kshaharatas and the Kardamakas who had grown particularly powerful in the first centuries A.D.

In the middle of the second century A.D. the Kshatrapas succeeded in capturing certain regions of the Western Deccan, which had previously belonged to the Satavahanas. Later under Nahapana the Kshatrapa domains were extended still further. Nahapana inscriptions found in Nasik and Karle indicate that these regions were part of his state. Epigraphic evidence also points to the fact that in the years 119-125 the Kshatrapas also controlled some areas of Southern Gujarat and the port of Bharukachchha (modern Broach). Long rivalry between the Kshatrapas and the Satavahanas ended in victory for the latter. Inscriptions refer to victories of the Satavahana king Gotamiputa Satakani over the Shakas. Evidently, he achieved ascendancy over parts of Western India.

In one of the inscriptions he is referred to as the destroyer of the Kshaharata line and the restorer of glory to the Satavahana dynasty. These inscriptions specified the borders of the Satavahana state during the reign of Gotamiputa Satakani: he captured parts of the North-Western Deccan and Western India from Nahapana. Furthermore he was in control of other neighbouring regions, Ashmaka and Vidarbha, and later annexed territories that had formerly belonged to the Satavahanas' old rival, Kalinga.

However the Satavahanas' victories were only short-lived. During the reign of the powerful Shaka Kshatrapa Rudradaman (in the year 150 A.D.) the Satavahanas were obliged to forego many of their newly acquired territories. In one of the inscriptions made at Rudradaman's behest he is referred to as the ruler of Avanti, Surashtra and Aparanta; in other words, extensive regions of Western India had fallen to the Shakas, while the Satavahanas only retained their hold over the Nasik and Poona areas, in the west.

Gotamiputa's descendants continued the struggle against the Kshatrapas. Under King Pulumavi (130-159 A.D.) the Satavahanas, after failing to score any spectacular successes in the western regions, concentrated their attention on the eastern regions. Sometimes, for example, during the reign of King Shri Yajna Shatakarni (whose inscriptions have been found in Nasik), they succeeded in annexing certain regions of Western India, however they were no longer in a position to uphold the unity of the empire. It was only in the eastern regions that the Satavahanas were able to maintain their influence.

## The State of the Vakatakas

After the fall of the Satavahanas various minor dynasties waged a bitter struggle for power. Eventually it was the Vakatakas who emerged as the most powerful. Their initial territorial nucleus was in the part of India now known as Berar. The beginning of this dynasty is given the approximate date of 255 A.D. The founder of the dynasty is held to be King Vindhyashakti who, according to information contained in the *Puranas*, waged war against the Shaka Kshatrapas and certain local dynasties in the Deccan, which had achieved their independence after the fall of the Satavahanas. Vindhyashakti's successor—Pravarasena I (275-335 A.D.)—was more successful in his foreign policy. He proudly assumed the title *samrat* (sole ruler). During his reign the Vakatakas ruled over extensive territories: regions between the Narbada and Krishna rivers were part of their domain. In his efforts to gain a foothold in Central India Pravarasena concluded a matrimonial union with the Naga dynasty: his son married Bhavanaga, daughter of a Naga king.

When the mighty Gupta state appeared in the political arena, the Vakatakas had to start thinking about the defence of their northern frontiers. Samudragupta's successful campaign in Southern India inevitably complicated Vakataka-Gupta relations.

In the famous Allahabad inscription referring to the Gupta king's military feats the states he conquered are listed; among the names of the conquered kings is that of King Rudradeva of Aryavarta. Many scholars equate Rudradeva with Rudrasena I (335-360), grandson of Pravarasena, who ruled the Vakatakas at that time. However the Guptas did not annex all those regions that had been seized during Samudragupta's southern campaign, although Gupta influence after that made itself much more powerfully felt. Both dynasties appreciated the importance of the establishment of friendly relations. The Guptas planned to bring pressure to bear on the southern parts through the medium of the Vakatakas, while the latter were not in a position to put up any strong resistance to the Guptas in open warfare. At that time the Guptas were concentrating their attention on the struggle against the Western Kshatrapas and were anxious to secure their southern frontiers. All this favoured friendly relations between the Guptas and the Vakatakas, while Rudrasena II, the heir to the Vakataka throne and grandson of King Rudrasena I, married Prabhavatigupta, daughter of the Gupta king Chandragupta II Vikramaditya.

Gupta influence made itself felt in particular at the Vakataka court when Prabhavatigupta became regent. At that time not only Gupta ambassadors but state officials as well made their way from Pataliputra to the Vakataka capital—Nandivardhana (near modern Nagpur). Soon afterwards a united dynasty was replaced by a number of local ones, the most influential of which was the Vakatakas from

Vatsagulma (Southern Berar). Yet these offshoots from the main line were not to remain in power for long and were soon obliged to recognise the sovereignty of the powerful Chalukya state.

### **The Pallavas and the States in the Extreme South**

Alongside the Vakatakas an important role in the political life of the Deccan was also played by the states of the Pallavas and the Ikshvakus after the fall of the Satavahanas; unfortunately, sources provide little information on these states. The Pallava capital was the town of Kanchipuram, and its northern border was formed by the river Krishna. The Pallavas clashed with the Guptas on more than one occasion. In Andhra at this time the Ikshvaku dynasty was in power and it had concluded an alliance with the Western Kshatrapas against the Pallavas, yet the Pallavas emerged victorious.

In the first centuries A.D. the large states of the Cheras, Pandyas and Cholas continued to exist in the extreme south of the country, states that had been mentioned as early as the inscriptions of the Mauryan emperor, Ashoka. These states had established direct links with Rome, which in its turn had set up trading stations in the south of India. Unfortunately almost nothing is known of the political history of these states, although in the first centuries A.D. some Tamil sources did appear. In the fourth-fifth centuries A.D. an outstanding work of Tamil literature, *Tiru Kural*, was written and this was followed by poems, grammatical treatises and other writings.

Available epigraphic material provides an overall picture of the system of administration in the states of the Deccan and Southern India in the first centuries A.D.

The Satavahanas and the Vakatakas set up a well-organised central administration. The empire was divided into provinces, and these in their turn consisted of districts. There was a large body of various officials, such as those in charge of provisions, chief scribes, military commanders, rural inspectors.

There are some references to the religious policies followed by the Satavahanas, the Vakatakas and other southern Indian dynasties. The Satavahanas protected the Buddhists. It is possible that the writings of the famous Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna are to be linked with the Satavahanas. The Chinese traveller Hsüan Tsang wrote that Nagarjuna even lived at the Satavahana court.

Along with Buddhism and Jainism, Hinduism also became widespread. In Vakataka inscriptions reference is made to the fact that Rudrasena I was a Shaivite, while Rudrasena II was a Vaishnava. This syncretism of religions constituted one of the specific features of cultural development in the Deccan and Southern India in ancient times and the early medieval period.

### Agriculture

The Kushana and Gupta periods were marked by a further advance in agriculture. New plots of land were cleared, swamps were drained and agriculture gradually came to assume more and more importance. The state encouraged farmers to cultivate virgin and forest land. The *Milinda-panho* and the *Manava Dharmashastra* put forward the idea that those who clear forest land and prepare the plot of land for cultivation will be granted ownership.

Rice was grown in areas having an abundance of water. These were in particular Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Orissa and the coastal areas of Southern India. At that time many different kinds of rice were already known. In the *Amarakosha* various types of soil are listed that are suitable for rice cultivation, for wheat, barley and sesame. Amarasinha, the author of this dictionary, was acquainted with beans, lentils, not to mention cucumbers, betel, onion, garlic and pumpkin. Sugar cane was also cultivated on a wide scale.

The south was well known for pepper and spices. In classical sources the southern regions were even referred to as the land of pepper. Farmers were able to bring in two or three harvests every year; many cereals were even exported. In the *Periplus Maris Erythrae* (second century A.D.) there are references to the export of rice and wheat. In later treatises special emphasis is laid on the fact that those who cultivated and irrigated waste land were to be exempt from the payment of taxes until such time as they had made twice as much in profits as they had initially needed to invest. It is worth mentioning that in the inscriptions of the Gupta age there are frequent references to the purchase of waste land, which must, it appears, have been an advantageous undertaking at the time and also have been encouraged by the state.

At that time new crops appeared in India from overseas. Agricultural techniques also became more advanced. The plough was the main tool used by farmers. In the *Brihaspati smriti* mention is made of the ploughshare which had to be of a fixed weight, and in his dictionary Amarasinha includes a detailed description of the plough. Agricultural implements made of iron became widespread and new types of implements also began to appear. In Taxila among archeological finds relating to the first century A.D. were axes of a new, more sophisticated type. It is possible that this was the result of foreign influence, since similar ones were to be found commonly in countries that had come under the influence of Roman cultural traditions. Apart from the spade, other finds at Taxila included sickles and hoes of a new shape.

In Indian sources descriptions of farm work are to be found. A good

farmer was held to be he who worked the soil two or three times before sowing. After the harvest had been reaped the grain would be separated from the straw in special premises. Later the grain would be threshed in a special mortar, separated from the husks with a threshing basket and then it would be dried and stored in granaries.

In the period under discussion horticulture also made considerable strides: new sorts of vegetables and fruit appeared such as peaches and pears. Ancient Indians were familiar with mangoes, oranges, grapes and bananas. Coconut palms were common particularly in the coastal regions. To judge by inscriptions of the second century A.D., it was at this stage that coconut plantations were first set up. In the sources of the time advice is provided as to how to protect fruit trees and tend them with special oils and fertilisers. The *Shastras* contain detailed information with regard to the quality of soils, plant diseases, the distances which should be left between fruit trees, etc.

Irrigation also seems to have been developing rapidly. Rudradaman fortified the dam on Lake Sudarshana which had been built in the days of the Mauryan empire. Special reservoirs for water storage were built. In a second-century inscription there is reference to the construction of an enormous reservoir in a village not far from Ujjain. In an inscription at Hathigumpha the king of Kalinga, Kharavela, proudly announces the construction of canals and reservoirs in his land.

In many sources from the Gupta period stress is laid on the importance of agriculture; the playwright Kalidasa regarded land cultivation and stock-breeding as vital sources of wealth.

In addition to livestock farming, fishing and forestry also came into prominence. Special officials were appointed to inspect forests.

### **Landownership. The Extension of Private Holdings**

In the early centuries A.D. there was a further development of private landownership. In the *Shastras* considerable attention is paid to the rights of the landowner and their protection. Very high fines were laid down for illegal seizure of land belonging to others. In the course of many decades the owner of the land was able to retain his right to the land regardless of whether or not he actually tilled it himself or rented it out to temporary tenants. In the era of the Guptas special charters appear, which register the purchase and sale of land. In Gupta inscriptions we find many references to the sale of land, while in inscriptions dating from the Kshatrapa and Kushana periods such cases are registered extremely rarely.

The state endeavoured as before to maintain its control over the land resources, while the village communities attempted to hinder the extension of private landownership; however the gradual concentration of land in private hands continued unabated.

Interesting information is to be gleaned, for example, from inscriptions at Nasik relating to the Western Kshatrapas. In one of these there is reference to the fact that Ushavadata, the son-in-law of king Nahapana, was obliged first of all to purchase a plot of land from a private individual before presenting it to the Buddhist *sangha*. It is possible that this was already indicative of the new process at work linked with the development of private landownership at the expense of royal lands. Ushavadata would appear not to have any free land at his disposal and have been obliged to buy the plot from a private landowner.

In the first centuries A.D. the number of grants to private individuals increased and, most important of all, the nature of these grants started to change gradually. Earlier grants had only affected rights of land usage but had not related to any rights over peasants. While previously many grants had been temporary, i.e., had lasted for as long as official duties were carried out, they now ever more often assumed a hereditary character.

This entrenched the rights of private owners and made them fairly independent of the central administration. Some types of grants became permanent, and in the charters that recorded these donations it was specified that the land was made over for perpetuity, "for as long as the sun and moon and stars do shine".

At this period when the king was distributing plots of land for temporary tenure, he also gradually began to grant certain privileges to the owners, so-called immunity rights.

The next step was for these owners to acquire certain administrative functions over the land and those actually working it. They started to carry out certain legal functions; the king freed them from the previous obligation to admit royal functionaries to their lands. One of the earliest references to such rights is found in a Satavahana inscription of the second century A.D. (this procedure is an unmistakable pointer to the process of feudalisation, not only in the north but in the Deccan as well). The Satavahana king Gautamiputra Shatakarni donated land to the Buddhist monks and at the same time freed the village community from the presence of the king's troops on their lands as well as from the interference of state functionaries. This practice became particularly widespread after the fifth century A.D., when the kings started to delegate almost all fiscal, administrative and legal functions connected with privately owned land to the owners themselves. The rights over mines were also transferred, although these too had traditionally been regarded as a royal monopoly.

The transfer by the state of certain of its public functions to private individuals was laid down in special charters, the text of which was engraved on copper plates handed over to the new owners. This practice brought the status of temporary landowner still nearer to that of hereditary feudal lord and gave rise to a situation in which peasants gradually came under the domination of these landowners. Of course

this process was a gradual one and the state still retained many of its administrative functions in rural areas for quite some time.

Social relations were noted by the spread of tenant farming. Tenant farmers, often bereft of any means of production, became completely dependent on the owners of land.

In ancient Indian sources from this period an increasing number of references is to be found to the "donation of villages", which implies the transfer by the king of the right to collect taxes from these villages. The land would not be transferred at the same time, but the person to whom the peasants had to pay their taxes would no longer be the same. Gradually, the free members of the village community became dependent on private owners who sought to increase their land rights. These "donations" were not as yet feudal in character, but a definite trend towards feudal relations was already to be observed. These "donations" were made also to state officials, as in the preceding period, in place of salary.

### **Changes in the Status of the Direct Producers. Feudal Patterns**

Fundamental changes were to be observed in the status of the direct producers—the slaves, the free members of village communities and the hired labourers. In the later *Shastras* rules concerning slaves are laid down in detail, and they are classified in various groups. There is a marked move against turning temporary slaves into life-long ones, duties of slave-owners are laid down, neglect of which can even lead to fining of masters. Later *Shastras* place particular emphasis on the question of the *varna* to which the slave belonged. Sources dating from the Gupta period strictly underline the principle of *varna*. It was above all the rights of the Brahmans that were defended, and then those of the "twice-born". Katyayana goes as far as announcing outright that slavery does not apply to the Brahmans. According to Yajnavalkya a man of a lower *varna* might be made a slave, i.e., the fact that the *kshatriyas* or the *vaishyas* might be made slaves by the Brahmans was accepted.

In this period the question as to whether slaves should be freed or not was the subject of much controversy and it is no accident that the later *Shastras* devote a lot of attention to this matter. Conditions for the freeing of slaves, especially temporary slaves, were made considerably more lax. The *Narada smṛiti* describe in detail the ceremony carried out when slaves were set free: the master would break a vessel containing water, sprinkle his slave's head and declare him a free man. Slaves who had had their condition forced upon them as a result of poverty (as a means of obtaining food) had to be set free if they refused food. If a man became a slave as a result of debts, then repayment of his debts together with the interest due were sufficient to restore him his freedom.

Considerable changes also came about with regard to the position of free cultivators. While initially only land would be transferred from one owner to another, later land would change hands together with the men working it. In one of the earliest records of such transactions, a third-century Pallava inscription, it is stated that the share-croppers remain bound to the land after its transfer to the Brahmins. Gradually this practice was applied even with regard to men who had formerly been free cultivators and members of a village community, which meant that they were reduced to little more than serfs. In a fifth-century Vakataka decree a case is mentioned in which four farms set aside for local cultivators (or *karshakas*) are to be used as a gift, in other words those tilling the land are made over with the land to the new owner. By the middle of the first millennium A.D. feudal economic patterns had taken shape in India and these gradually developed, until a whole feudal society had become established. In the sixth and seventh centuries A.D. feudal relations were dominant within the multi-structural Indian society.

### **Crafts and the Associations of Artisans**

The level of craftsmanship in India rose considerably in the first centuries A.D. Indian metal-workers and foundrymen were famed for their skills. Even now it is still a mystery how in the fifth century they were able to make the Iron Pillar (more than seven metres high and weighing over six tons), which despite the damp climate has not suffered from corrosion or rust. In the *Milinda-panho* the working of gold, iron, lead and tin are singled out from other crafts. Those plying these crafts worked separately from each other. The king's metal-workers and armourers constituted a special group of artisans. State control over this section of the artisans was apparently particularly strict: the king was regarded as the owner of all minerals, and the right to extract metals was regarded as a royal prerogative. The production of arms was made subject to still closer supervision from the central administration.

A great variety of iron articles was being produced. Characteristic of the period is an appreciable Greco-Roman influence, on the one hand, and from Central Asia, on the other, with regard to production of weapons (for example, in Taxila and other north-western regions arms were produced according to Shaka models), but on the whole the metal-workers followed local traditions. Iron and steel articles were of a very high quality and exported on a wide scale. The *Periplus Maris Erythraeae* mentions the export of Indian iron and steel to African ports. In this work there is also reference to the export of copper. The metal-workers of the time were known for their artistry. The work of Indian jewellers was held in high regard far beyond the frontiers of India. In Taxila there appear to have been foreign jewellers and other craftsmen who were familiar with Hellenistic traditions, for many pieces of



jewellery discovered in the area bear a likeness to pieces from Egypt and Syria. In Eastern India, on the other hand, foreign influences were negligible.

The art of weaving was also making rapid strides, particularly with regard to the production of cotton fabric. Both cotton materials and silk were exported to the West where they were held in high esteem. In Indian writings dating from the first centuries A.D. there are references to various types of cotton materials dyed in different colours. Classical authors noted that Indian cotton was of a very light colour and purer in texture than that produced elsewhere. Fabrics from Benares were held in particularly high esteem and likewise the fine cottons from Bengal referred to in the *Periplus Maris Erythraeae*. In the north-west woollen materials were also produced. There was considerable demand in the Hellenistic countries and in Rome for spices, perfumes and articles fashioned from ivory. Production of glass also developed apace; it was used to make eating utensils and articles of adornment.

In the Kushana and Gupta periods the guilds or *shrenis* became more sophisticated. These artisans' associations played an important role in Indian economic life, and the state endeavoured to place their activities under its control. However the *Shastras* demanded from the king that he respect the rules of the *shreni* and uphold their property rights. The independence of the *shreni* at that time was so considerable that, to judge by inscriptions of the time, they were able to draw up contracts with individuals and even enter into agreements with the central authorities. The *shreni* borrowed money from various individuals, who gave them commissions, that later had to be paid back with interest. Some of the *shreni* were extremely rich and were able to give to the Buddhist monks very costly gifts, even whole buildings. The *shrenis* had their own seals and symbols. Some of these seals, complete with inscriptions, have been found by archeologists during excavations of settlements dating back to the first centuries A.D.

### Trade

In the period in question internal and foreign trade expanded to a remarkable degree. Many formerly uninhabited regions had been settled, transport was better organised and trade routes had improved. The various parts of the country were now more closely linked. The economic specialisation of the various areas and zones made a permanent exchange of commodities essential. The circulation of money was also expanding very intensively at this period. Under the Guptas the state had devoted particular attention to the construction of roads and communications. Yet despite all this work the exchange between the various parts of the country was still of a very limited

nature. Roads were not always suitable for long journeys and traders encountered a good many problems.

Apart from the overland routes, rivers were now being made much fuller use of: this applied in particular to the Ganges and the Indus.

The state supervised the influx and selling of commodities. The sale of certain commodities was subject to strict control by the state and there was a royal monopoly on trade in certain items. In the *Manava Dharmashastra* it is written that the king could confiscate the whole of a merchant's property, if he was found exporting wares which came under royal monopoly. There was competition both between individual merchants and also between traders' associations.

In the towns there were special trade districts where the shops were concentrated. In the *Milinda-panho* there is a description of the flourishing city of Sagala (or Shakala)—the capital of the state of Menander, where there were special stalls for the sale of Benares fabrics, jewellery, perfumes, etc.

The Ganges valley was the principal trade area; from it there branched off trade routes leading to many parts of the country. The main trade centres in that area were Bharukachha (known by the Greeks as Barygaza) in the west, Patala (referred to as Patalene in Greek texts) in the Indus delta, Pushkalavati in the north-west and Tamralipti (modern Tamluk) in the east. In the *Periplus Maris Erythrae* there is mention of trade routes leading southwards from Pushkalavati. In Eastern India Varanasi, Kaushambi and Pataliputra were well known for their high-quality wares, and in the west, Ujjain.

The *Periplus Maris Erythrae* contains a reference to vessels sailing southwards down the coast of the Bay of Bengal, and the *Milinda-panho* speaks of shipowners visiting Sind, Bengal and the Coromandel coast. Woollen materials were brought from the north, precious stones and spices from the south, metals and silk from the east, and fabrics and horses from the west. Sind and Arachosia were famed for their horses.

The era of the Kushana and Gupta kings was marked by rapid development in the sphere of foreign trade. This was facilitated by close contacts maintained first by the Kushana kings and later the Gupta rulers with foreign lands. Trade involving sea routes also expanded. The ancient Indians were skilled navigators and appear to have been able to make use of the monsoons long before the Greek sea-captain Hippalus discovered them in the middle of the first century A.D. (some sources indicate that the Greeks too knew of the monsoons at an earlier date). The Indians traded with Arabia, the Mediterranean countries, and their vessels went as far as Africa. Such voyages were a continuation and extension of the contacts that had existed since times of old between India and the lands of the Mediterranean. A lively trade was also carried on with the countries of South-East Asia and Sri Lanka. Ships were depicted on Satavahana coins, which points to the growing importance of maritime trade.

The author of the *Periplus Maris Erythraeae* saw large Indian vessels on the Malabar coast, that were known as *sangara*. In one of the early Indian texts large vessels were referred to with the almost identical term, *sangada*. In the first centuries A.D. Egyptian traders used to send their ships to India, and Indian merchants, according to the *Periplus Maris Erythraeae* took up permanent residence on the island of Dioscorides (Socotra).

An interesting chapter in the history of maritime exploration in the ancient world was the voyage undertaken by the Chinese pilgrim Fa Hsien from India to China. He started out from Tamralipti, making his way first to Sri Lanka, then across the ocean to Java before finally returning to China.

Rome played an important part in the Oriental trade of that period. The Romans imported many goods from India and at the same time set up their own trading stations in the country. A particularly famous one of these was that at Arikamedu (near modern Pondicherry), where Roman coins, amphoras and Roman glass have been found. Trading in commodities from Southern India was very much to Rome's advantage, and it is no accident that large quantities of Roman coins have been found precisely in that part of India. There are records of several embassies India sent to the court of the emperors Augustus and Trajan. There are also records of the gift sent to Augustus by King Pandian who would appear to be the ruler of the South Indian Pandya kingdom.

Indian spices, in particular pepper, as well as perfumes, rare kinds of timber, fabrics, and also exotic birds and animals proved most popular in the West.

When the king of the Visigoths Alaric laid siege to Rome at the beginning of the fifth century, he demanded by way of ransom an enormous quantity of pepper which he was given. Classical writers tell of the Indian lions that were sent to Rome for display. Indian tigers were brought before the Emperor Claudius. Indian parrots proved especially popular with the Roman public.

India also exported articles of ivory, silk, precious stones, shells, musk, iron and steel. In the *Periplus Maris Erythraeae* there are references to the export of Indian slave-girls trained in the arts of music and dancing. In Pompeii an ivory statuette of the Indian goddess Lakshmi was found. Many ivory articles dating back to Kushana times have been found in Begram (Afghanistan).

India used to import certain commodities, as can be learnt from classical writers, archeological findings and, in particular, from the *Periplus Maris Erythraeae*. These goods would be imported from the West mainly via the port of Barygaza. India imported wine, papyrus, incense, certain metals, cereals (such as sesame), oils and honey. In this particular period the Great Silk Road assumed great importance, linking as it did the Far East with the West and passing by way of India too.

For merchants, just as for artisans, there existed associations which were also known as *shreni*.

### **The Varna and the Jati in the First Centuries A.D.**

The first centuries A.D. saw a continuation of those processes within the social estate structure which had begun in the preceding period: man's actual position in society, his property status come more and more to the fore. At the same time his lineage no longer possessed the decisive significance that it had had before. As Buddhism and Jainism gained more and more ground, so the role of the Brahmins as the all-important performers of religious rites became less pre-eminent.

Many Brahmin families were impoverished, and representatives of the Brahmin *varna* were obliged to take up other occupations. The role of the Brahmins in the ideological sphere declined, although later in connection with a new resurgence of Hinduism, their influence was enhanced. There were other new developments affecting the role of the *kshatriya varna*. The republics in which the *kshatriyas* had played the key role were gradually losing their importance. The practice of recruiting mercenaries into the army naturally left its mark on the status of the *kshatriyas*, the professional warriors. Like the Brahmin families, so too the *kshatriya* lines were sinking into poverty; members of other *varnas* were being appointed to public office more and more frequently, something which had previously been almost unheard of.

Interesting facts were noted down by the Chinese visitor to India, Hsüan Tsang. While he was in India the kaleidoscope of kings ruling over India was as follows: five *kshatriyas*, four *Brahmins*, two *vaishyas* and two *shudras*.

The disintegration of the *vaishya varna*, which had begun earlier, continued rapidly under the Gupta rulers. There was now little to distinguish the poor *vaishyas* from the *shudras*, whose position, evidently, as a result of the rapid growth of agriculture and the advance of the crafts, had to some extent improved. In the source material from that period there are more and more references to the use of *shudra* labour in agriculture. In his *Records of Western Countries* Hsüan Tsang presents the *shudras* as tillers of the land, while in the *Shastras* of the Gupta period a clear distinction is already drawn between the *shudras* and the slaves. Thus the traditional *varna* divisions were coming gradually to lose their former significance. The more important distinctions were now those of caste or *jati*. The *jatis* like the *varnas* were hereditary, and associated with specific professions. However these were smaller categories, sometimes no more than groups of people linked together by economic interests. The number of *jatis* gradually increased.

The formation of the *jati* continued far later. As a result of the division of labour and its specialisation there was a particularly marked growth in the number of castes in the towns, among the various categories of craftsmen. The number of castes in rural areas also grew. *Jati* existed as a social institution separate from the *varnas*. At the same time the *varna* principle was rigidly observed. In the Gupta period there were not as yet such strict laws regarding caste as those that were to emerge later; it was still possible in certain cases for castes to change their traditional occupations.

In inscriptions of the period it is stated that in Western India the association of silk weavers moved to another area after experiencing production problems. The weavers took up other professions: some became soldiers, archers and even bards which meant that from a social point of view, as regards the *varna* hierarchy, they had moved up the scale.

The Brahmins attempted to explain the emergence of *jati* by a mingling of the *varnas*. In view of the violations of the strict rules concerning contact between the *varnas*, the scholars versed in Brahmin law were concentrating their attention on the "purity" of the *varnas*. Only the children of parents belonging to one and the same *varna* were regarded as pure and legitimate. Even a marriage between a Brahmin and a *kshatriya* was seen as a departure from *varna* "law". Children of mixed marriages were assigned to a different category of persons than that of their parents, to a specific *jati*. This was how the Brahmins endeavoured to account for the *jati*, the new social groupings that had emerged as a result of social development, in particular the division of labour. The untouchables appeared. They stood outside the *varna* system and were at the very bottom of the social ladder.

These were the groups obliged to carry out the most menial work (refuse cleaners, cemetery sweepers, butchers, etc.); members of higher castes were not allowed to have anything to do with the untouchables who were sometimes singled out by specific marks indicating their low status. The untouchables did not enjoy any political rights.

#### RELIGIOUS TRENDS AND PHILOSOPHICAL SCHOOLS IN THE EARLY CENTURIES A.D.

##### **Mahayana Buddhism**

Various trends and sects were to emerge amongst the followers of Buddhism very early in the history of that religion. Even the very first councils put forward differing interpretations of many tenets of the Buddhist doctrine. By the Mauryan period two main groups had emerged: the Sthaviravadinās (who adhered to the teaching of the

elders) and the Mahasanghikas (who favoured the large community and advocated more liberal rules).

This latter trend evidently provided the essential part of the Mahayana teaching (Great Vehicle or Great Way) whose adherents started to set themselves apart from those of the Hinayana (the Lesser Vehicle or Low Way). The term *Hinayana* is not found very often in Buddhist writings. It was used to refer to the teachings accepted by the so-called orthodox Buddhists. There was no open conflict between the adherents of these two schools in India. Initially the adherents of the Mahayana doctrine were few in number. According to Hsüan Tsang they abided by the Hinayana rules of Vinaya. Even in the seventh century A.D. the Chinese pilgrim I Tsing recorded how adherents of the Hinayana and Mahayana teachings lived side by side in the same Buddhist monasteries in Northern India. He wrote that they abided by one and the same Vinaya rules and acknowledged the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism; however those who venerated *bodhisattvas* and read the Mahayana *sutras* were regarded as Mahayanists, and the rest were Buddhists of the Hinayana school.

The earliest Mahayana texts would appear to have been written as far back as the first century B.C., however a large number date from the first centuries A.D. Some of the earliest of these writings were the *Prajnaparamita sutras*, Chinese translations of which appeared as early as the end of the second century A.D. The most popular works of Mahayana Buddhism were the *Saddharmapundarikasutra* (White Lotus-sutra of the Good Law), the *Lankavatara-sutra* (Sutra on the Coming to Lanka) and the *Suvarnaprabhasasutra* (Sutra of the Golden Radiance).

The Mahayanists did not see Hinayana teaching as a hostile threat to their own beliefs or as an erroneous doctrine. They regarded it as a doctrine which was inadequate for the broad propagation of Buddhist ideas, and too individualistic. Asanga, one of the founders of the Mahayana school of Yogachara, drew attention to the limited nature of the Hinayana teaching. According to that teaching man should be preoccupied with salvation for himself alone, the attainment of enlightenment, of *nirvana* for himself, as an individual. Mahayana, on the other hand, laid emphasis upon compassion and help that should be given to all living creatures regardless of their individual characteristics. The Mahayanists regarded their teaching as the re-emergence of the true teaching of Buddha, which, they maintained, adherents of the Hinayana school (Vibhajavadinas and Sthaviravadinas) distorted and stifled through their egoism and individualism. This led them to refer to their own doctrine as the "Great Way" thus underlining the breadth of their interpretation of the idea of salvation and the broad range of followers won over to the teaching of Buddha.

One of the most important tenets of the Mahayana doctrine is that concerning the *bodhisattva*. The concept of the *bodhisattva* was also

to be found in the Hinayana doctrine, in particular among the followers of the later school of the Sarvastivadinās (Gautama Shakyamuni was held to be a *bodhisattva* before his enlightenment, i.e., before he became Buddha). The cult of the *bodhisattvas* assumed far greater importance for the Mahayanists. They saw him as a being possessed of the capacity to become a Buddha, who had been drawing near to the attainment of *nirvana*, but who out of great compassion to other creatures and the whole world forebore from the *nirvana*. For the Mahayanists the *bodhisattva* replaced the Hinayana ideal of the attainment of *arhantship*.

The Mahayanists held that one of the main weaknesses of Hinayana was the narrow limitations of its goal, salvation for oneself alone, and even the *arhant* (a Buddhist saint) does not in their eyes overcome completely the fetters of his own inner self; he attempts to achieve *nirvana* for himself, without thinking of others remaining within the circle of *samsara*, within the cycle of births and deaths. The Mahayanists taught that the *arhant* was unable fully to surmount the differences between himself and others and thus to achieve the state of his own "non-being". This made it logical for men to imitate not the *arhant*, that had concentrated all attention on his liberation, but the *bodhisattva*, who turned his back on worldly life in order to help others, men living in the day-to-day world.

The members of the Mahayana sect disapproved of the narrowness of the Hinayana beliefs. According to the Hinayana teaching only monks could attain *nirvana*, after making a complete break with worldly life, while the Mahayana sect believed that supreme salvation was accessible to laymen as well. In Mahayana texts it is constantly being emphasised that *bodhisattvas* do not seek after *nirvana* for themselves alone, but are called to strive after the achievement of happiness for the world as a whole, the attainment of *nirvana* for all living creatures. The *bodhisattva* accepts suffering of his own free will, in order to help others, and he refrains from seeking his own salvation for as long as all others have not been set free from suffering. In this sense all followers of Buddha are treated as a single entity. These tenets of Mahayana Buddhism made it very popular among laymen, for whom Mahayana beliefs opened the "path to salvation" with the promise of help from the compassionate *bodhisattvas*.

Quite different in the Mahayana beliefs was the interpretation of the image of Buddha, the founder of the teaching, and that of the actual concept "Buddha". While the Hinayana sect saw Buddha as a real historical figure pointing out to the faithful the paths and means of "salvation", the Mahayana sect saw him as the supreme absolute being, the cornerstone of the whole microcosm, who thus acquired a specific metaphysical and religious significance. Every living being is potentially capable of becoming a Buddha, because within him is contained a particular particle of the essence of Buddha (*buddhata*).

This Buddhahood pervades all that exists and manifests itself in "three bodies", which are the three facets of the one Buddha: the *dharmakaya* or body of *Dharma*, i.e., the cosmic manifestation, the *sambhogakaya* or body of enjoyment, i.e., the divine manifestation among supernatural creatures, and the *nirmanakaya* or created body (also known as the *Rupakaya* or Body of Image), i.e., the manifestation of Buddha in the image of man. The Mahayanists acknowledged the existence of several buddhas, of whom Gautama was but one. They held that through these manifestations in the "three bodies" Buddha brings salvation to all creatures in the cosmic, celestial and terrestrial worlds.

According to Mahayana beliefs, the buddhas and *bodhisattvas* become objects of worship. The ceremonial and ritual aspects of worship assume particular importance. In Buddhist art the Buddha comes to be depicted as the supreme being.

Since the Mahayanists believed that *nirvana* was attained with the help of the *bodhisattvas*, believers sought to assure themselves of the former's good will by means of rich offerings. In the first centuries A.D. the monasteries acquired all manner of valuable property; kings and other rich followers of Buddha donated land, large sums of money and other valuables to them.

The Mahayana teaching on *nirvana* was marked by unusual features, while *nirvana* was presented in different ways by the various Mahayana schools. But unlike the Hinayana approach the Mahayana teaching viewed *nirvana* not as the extinguishing of reality or its relinquishment but as reality itself. The Mahayana sect developed the teaching of the *paramitas* (the Perfections) with the aid of which the devout could attain moral perfection. There were six principal *paramitas*: generosity, virtuous behaviour, tolerance, spiritual vigour, contemplation and intuition enabling man to apprehend the idea of supreme enlightenment. Each of the *paramitas* was seen as a step to the attainment of supreme wisdom (*prajna*). Thus the fundamental tenets of the teachings adopted by the Hinayana and the Mahayana sects differed widely from each other, indeed some Buddhologists even regard Mahayana as a doctrine quite separate from Hinayana. Others see Mahayana beliefs as a continuation and extension of Hinayana concepts.

Despite the substantial differences between the two sects, they shared certain basic conceptions with regard to the exposition of doctrine. Both focussed attention on "salvation" and paths leading to it, regarded all that exists as changing and transient, both accepted the law of *Karma*, and viewed the attainment of *nirvana* as something within man's reach albeit by different paths.



## Schools of Mahayana Philosophy

The best known of these schools in the first centuries A.D. were the Madhyamika and the Yogachara schools. The outstanding philosophers Nagarjuna and Aryadeva, both of whom probably lived in the second century A.D., can be seen as the founders of the former school. Mahayana writings already existed at the time of these philosophers and indeed Nagarjuna makes references to them in his work.

The fundamental tenet of Madhyamika teaching was the doctrine of *Shunyata* (literally, the Void), and for this reason the school is frequently referred to as the Shunyavada. According to Nagarjuna everything which exists, whether it be material or spiritual, is unreal. At the same time the *shunya* is a negation of non-being, a complete absence of duality; it therefore had not a negative but a positive significance. The Madhyamikas then went on to conclude that *nirvana* and *samsara* were not opposites. They taught that after passing through all the *paramitas* and attaining the supreme level of moral perfection, object, as it were, ceases to differ from subject, *nirvanu* from the world, and existence from non-existence. The teaching of Buddha, his *Dharma*, was declared to be the *shunya*. Nagarjuna's ideas, which represented one of the most important events in the history of Buddhism, exerted a considerable influence upon the development of the ideas of Mahayana and religious and philosophical thought in ancient and early Middle Age India.

The philosophers Asanga and Vasubandhu (fourth and fifth centuries A.D.) are seen as the founders of the Yogachara school. This school accepted only man's consciousness or mind as real, and viewed the whole material world as an unreal illusion. This led the Yogacharas to concentrate their attention on consciousness and methods for perfecting man's contemplative faculties.

Mahayana (in particular the school of the Madhyamikas) was widely adopted in many Asian countries, in particular in the Far East. It was easily reconciled with local religions and absorbed their rituals. In India itself the influence of Buddhism underwent a marked decline during the Gupta period.

## The Decline of Buddhism. Hinduism

Despite the spread of Mahayanist ideas in the first centuries A.D. and the advance of Hinayana and Mahayana schools of philosophy, during the Gupta period and in particular immediately after it Buddhism declined in importance. In the country where it had first emerged, Buddhism was now in retreat. Chinese travellers of the period noted deserted monasteries, and the writings of the Gupta

period contain open attacks on Buddhist monks. To judge by the available data the Gupta kings worshipped Vishnu and Shiva, although at the same time they evidently pursued a policy of religious tolerance. Gradually North-Western India and Kashmir were to emerge as the centre of Buddhism. Meanwhile in the Ganges valley Vaishnavism and Shaivism were assuming more and more importance.

The decline of Buddhism coincided with another important event in the history of Indian religion and culture—namely the resurgence of Hinduism, although in practical terms many features of that religion and its accompanying rites had never died out. The amazing ease with which Hindu tradition absorbed various local religions, its philosophy, which admitted the simultaneous existence of numerous interpretations in the form of schools of thought that were virtually independent of each other, the preservation and development of traditional social institutions (this applied above all to the defence of the *varna* system), all served to make Hinduism, this unusual religious synthesis, more acceptable for the most diverse social strata than various heretical trends. By the beginning of the Middle Ages Hinayana Buddhism had practically disappeared in India after becoming the main religion of Sri Lanka, and later South-East Asia. The “northern” variation of Buddhism (Mahayana) still retained some degree of influence in India for several centuries to come, but gradually, both as regards its mythology and as regards its religious rites, it came to resemble Hinduism. Hinduism was exerting a growing influence on Buddhism and in Buddhist monasteries one can even find representations of Hindu divinities. It is interesting to note that Buddha was proclaimed to be one of the incarnations of the god Vishnu. Between the eighth and ninth centuries Hinduism came gradually to absorb all the strictly Indian Mahayana schools once and for all.

By the Gupta period orthodox Brahmanism had also undergone considerable changes. The old divinities had lost their popularity, the rituals laid down in the *Vedas* and the *Brahmanas* were by this time hopelessly out of date and seemed unnecessarily complicated. Nevertheless the religious and philosophical concepts found in the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad-Gita* made it possible to incorporate any local sects and beliefs into the Brahmanist tradition hallowed for centuries.

The emergence of the system that was to be known as Hinduism (or, to be more precise, *Hindi Dharma* or Indian Law) only after many centuries had elapsed (when it proved necessary in view of the Arab invasion to provide this whole group of sects with some overall designation) began long before the Gupta era and was linked with the first attempts to reconcile the mythology of Brahmanism with local beliefs of the native tribes (mostly Dravidian).

## Vaishnavism

The first of the two main schools of Hinduism emerged as early as the Mauryan period, but Vaishnavism only became widespread under the Gupta rulers. The main divinity, Vishnu, appears in the early texts under the name Narayana, who would appear to be the deity worshipped by the native tribes of Northern India. In the texts of the *Brahmanas* he is already referred to as the mighty god and is even on occasions placed higher than the later Vedic god Prajapati, the "creator of the universe".

Later Narayana became just another name for Vishnu, one of the Vedic variants of the Sun-god. The name Vishnu by all appearances would seem to be of local origin. Subsequently this divinity is referred to exclusively by the name of Vishnu, and the religious movement that proclaims him to be the supreme god becomes known as Vaishnavism.

The enormous popularity of this religion in India can be explained to a large extent by the truly unique capacity of this branch of Hinduism to assimilate various local beliefs and ceremonies of worship. This was possible thanks to the well elaborated system of *vyuhas* and *avatars*. The essence of the notion *vyuha* is that the all-powerful god Narayana-Vishnu consistently reveals himself in four different forms; this led to an incorporation of several popular local gods within the concept of Vishnu; among these divinities was the figure of Vasudeva who became almost more important in later Vaishnavite literature than Narayana himself. Many attributes of Vishnu as conceived in medieval times can be traced precisely to Vasudeva, who among other things was linked with the divine bird Garuda. The worship of Vasudeva, and later of Vishnu, came to embrace veneration of Sankarshana, to whom farming tribes paid homage.

The worship of Vishnu came to incorporate yet another divinity—Krishna, who was soon to become one of the most popular. God Krishna is depicted as a mischievous youth engaging in flirtation with Gopis. The system of *vyuha* made possible the incorporation of Vasudeva and Krishna in Vaishnavism.

Still more significant in its implications was the syncretic tendency of Vaishnavism connected with the idea of *avatara*. This word denotes "descent" or more precisely "the earthly incarnation of the divinity in the interests of man". Earlier literature mentions four *avatars* of Narayana-Vishnu, but later counts are as high as twenty-nine. This principle allowing the incorporation of diverse cults into one religion made possible the adoption of a wide variety of figures from all manner of religions into Vaishnavism. Limited space here makes it only possible to name the most famous among them: three of the forms in which Vishnu appears are those of animals—as a giant wild boar he saves mankind from perishing in the waters; at the hour of the

Flood, in the form of a fish he brought to safety the Indian ark, a ship on which the king of the Earth, Manu, was saved, and as a turtle he took part in the churning of the ocean. As the divine hero Rama he marries Sita (the goddess of agriculture) after freeing her from the demon king Ravana, and conquers Lanka. This theme later provided the core of Valmiki's famous *Ramayana*.

In connection with the history of early Vaishnavism it is most interesting to compare data to be gleaned from literary sources and material found in dated epigraphic documents.

In the grammar compiled by Panini (fifth or fourth centuries B.C.) reference is made to the worship of Vasudeva, who was traditionally held to have been a heroic *kshatriya*, the hero of a *kshatriya* association of *vrashnis* (within which the Vasudevas constituted a privileged family). Patanjali (second century B.C.) used both these motifs in his writing: in his work Vasudeva appears both as a *kshatriya* and as the object of religious veneration. The second motif is elaborated in particular detail in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, in which Vasudeva already appears as one of the manifestations of the supreme god Bhagavata.

References in Megasthenes' records to the "Indian Heracles" testify to the spread of Vasudeva worship in the early Mauryan period. This figure is described by the Seleucid ambassador as a heroic warrior and vanquisher of demons. The worship of Vasudeva, according to Indian sources, was particularly popular in Mathura; a point also made by Megasthenes in connection with Heracles. It can be assumed that the Greek writer was depicting that period of early Vaishnavism when Vasudeva was already deified but not yet equated with the figure of Krishna.

In the famous Heliodorus inscription at Besnagar (second century B.C.) there is mention of reverence of the "god of gods" Vasudeva, and, to judge by this inscription, the worship of Vasudeva was widespread not merely among Indians, but also among the Greeks inhabiting North-Western India.

On the basis of other pieces of epigraphic evidence from the end of the first millennium B.C. it can be concluded that the cults of Vishnu, Narayana and Vasudeva merged together as one at about that time. In the early centuries A.D. temples were already being erected to the Vaishnavite deities (Vishnu, Vasudeva and Sankarshana), a characteristic feature of medieval Hinduism. There is a reference for example to the temples built in honour of Sankarshana in the *Arthashastra*.

A feature which clearly distinguishes Hinduism not only from Brahmanism but also from the majority of other religions is that its teaching concerns not one but three gods, each of which ranks equal to the other two. This strictly Indian version of the "trinity" came to be known as the Trimurti. It includes the gods Brahma (the Creator), Vishnu (the Preserver) and Shiva (the Destroyer). The

first of these. Brahma, was incorporated from the Vedic pantheon; in the later religion he came to be regarded as the expression of the actual idea of creation, rather than as a separate god in his own right. Hardly any temples were erected in Brahma's honour as they were in honour of Vishnu and Shiva (and also Shakti, the Mother Goddess, who later assumed a prominent place among the Hindu gods), although Brahma is often mentioned in religious writings. At the same time each of these three gods reflected, as it were, the world as a whole. The followers of Vishnu referred to him not only as the custodian of the universe but also as its creator and destroyer. All three cosmogonic functions could also be assumed by Shiva. This feature of the Hindu religion inevitably made for religious tolerance, and also facilitated the coexistence of various religious and philosophical teachings within this tradition.

### Shaivism

Side by side with Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Shaktism also won great popularity. Shiva had gone down in Brahmanic literature as akin to Rudra—the Vedic god of thunderstorms and hurricanes surrounded by a host of cruel spirits hostile to man. This equation of Shiva and Rudra took place at a very late stage. In fact it was a question of the incorporation into Brahmanism of a local deity, whose cult was evidently linked with the religious beliefs of the people of the southern part of the sub-continent, in the way that Narayana-Vishnu reflected the religious beliefs of the population in the northern part of the country.

The cult of Shiva is associated with ecstasy. Shiva was seen as dancing on the site of funeral pyres, rubbing his body with the ashes of the dead and wearing a necklace of skulls instead of a garland around his neck. When he appears on earth in the guise of an impecunious ascetic, he uses a human skull as a begging bowl. Other of his accoutrements underline his terrible power and might: he is attired in a tiger skin, armed with a trident, a bow and an axe. However destruction is only one of the two forms of his activity. Shiva is the god of asceticism and animal sacrifice; he is also the protector of men in their ordinary day-to-day lives.

Evidence of the spread of Shaivism under the Magadha, Mauryan and Shunga rulers is to be gleaned from the writings of Panini, Patanjali and Megasthenes. In his grammar Panini writes of the followers of Shiva, and Patanjali refers to idols erected in his honour. Megasthenes' references to an "Indian Dionysius" are clearly to be linked with Shiva. He is described as a god popular among mountain-dwellers (cf. the "lord of the mountains" of Indian legend) who arranged special ceremonies with the beating of drums and sacrifices (very similar to the cult of Shiva).

Shiva is often represented on Kushana coins. His constant companions are Ganesha and Skanda who also appear previously to have been independent gods in their own right. The figure of Ganesha here has the body of a man and the head of an elephant with an enormous rat by his side, and is associated with the world of demons and the subterranean kingdom. His incorporation into the Shaivite pantheon is an artificial compromise that was made at a much later period.

Skanda—Shiva's devoted son—was represented as a chaste youth unversed in the secrets of love and bereft of a mother (the legend attributes his birth directly to Shiva himself). He is the king of mighty warriors, and therefore his struggle against hostile demons assumes a particularly significant place in the myths concerned with his life. The figure of Skanda is one of the most complex in Hindu tradition.

This assimilation of the mythological figures of Narayana-Vishnu and Shiva was followed by Brahmanism's adoption of the enormous and diverse range of cults practised throughout India to honour the supreme goddess. Essentially this process had already been initiated through the veneration of male gods who had been adopted by Hinduism together with their female hypostases. Lakshmi (spouse of Vishnu) and Uma or Parvati (wife of Shiva).

Hindu ritual differed in essential features from the Brahmanical variety: it evolved in the early Middle Ages and has been practised among orthodox Brahmins almost without modification up until the present day. In most cases Hinduism simply replaced the ancient gods with new divinities of a religion embracing the whole of India; thus Prajapati was equated with Brahma and to some extent with Narayana.

Yet some fundamentally new elements were introduced. The old religion had not required buildings set aside for worship, nor had it known material representations of deities in various forms. The Hindu religion at this new stage manifested itself above all in other forms of veneration: temples were regarded as "houses for the gods"; the activities of the priests were little more than the constant praying for the good of their "patrons"; idols served to embody the personal presence of the god concerned; each morning it would be subjected to ceremonial washing, sprinkled with fragrant waters, carried out into the streets of the town, so that the god might delight in the sight of his followers, and then be taken back into the temple, where it would be entertained with music and elaborate dances performed usually by professional women dancers.

Hindu architecture was developing apace at this period; the temples of medieval India constitute an important achievement in the history of Indian art.

## Bhagavad-Gita

Although it constitutes no more than a short episode in Book VI of the *Mahabharata* the *Song of the Bhagavata* proved immensely important in the religious life of India. All prominent authorities on Hinduism considered themselves bound to compile their commentaries to the Gita or at least to proclaim what their views were with regard to the teaching expounded therein. Europeans discovered the *Gita* as Indology was just taking shape and a large number of academic studies on this subject compiled in Europe was added to the ocean of commentaries already extant in India.

A short outline of the subject of this unique work might read as follows: the epic treating of the enmity between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, culminating in the grandiose battle at Kurukshetra, contains the following small episode—one of the five Pandava brothers, Arjuna, seeing his kinsmen assembled on the field of battle about to begin a fratricidal warfare, refuses to fight and seeks advice from his mentor in the martial arts, Krishna. The latter points out to him the demands of a *kshatriya*'s duty which make it impossible for him to avoid battle. Arjuna accepts his judgement as correct and joins the fray. However in the *Gita* itself the events bearing upon the main theme of the *Mahabharata* are only mentioned in the opening chapters of the poem. It consists in the main of a dialogue concerning man's destination, the essence of morality and the relationship between the earthly and the divine. Krishna, one of the many heroes in the epic, here appears as the earthly incarnation of the all-powerful god Bhagavata. His advice is not simply an answer to the question as to the righteous or unrighteous cause of the battle, but a rich philosophical exhortation, a whole religious and philosophical doctrine. The poem culminates in Arjuna's "insight"; he acknowledges himself to be not only a warrior, a *kshatriya*, and opponent of the Kauravas, but also a zealous follower of the new faith, to which Bhagavata himself, in the *avatara* of Krishna, has converted him.

The teaching as expounded in the poem took shape in an age when there existed side by side such widely differing religions and religious-philosophical trends as the Brahmanism of the *Upanishads*, Buddhism, Jainism, Ajivikism, and when the philosophy of the Sankhya and Yoga schools was emerging. While interacting with these trends and incorporating some of their tenets, the *Gita* at the same time represented a completely independent and, in many respects, original complex of ideas. It represented an attempt, as it were, to reform Brahmanical ideas within the framework of orthodox tradition, so as to consolidate that tradition at a time of major social and spiritual change. For this reason the true nature of the teachings contained in the *Gita* can only be understood if they are compared with the ideas expounded in the *Upanishads* and those propagated by various reformatory teachings and sects.

Textual analysis has revealed that the *Gita* was written later than the early *Upanishads* (seventh to fifth century B.C.) and approximately coincides in time with the so-called middle *Upanishads* (second century B.C. to fourth century A.D.). This continuity was something quite deliberate on the part of the *Gita*'s authors. It is reflected not only in the similarity relating to many principles of doctrine and in the use of identical terms but also in direct, almost word-for-word coincidences.

The authors of the *Gita* also make no secret of their familiarity with early forms of Sankhya and Yoga philosophy (the *Gita* provides invaluable material on the genesis of these schools of philosophy). Numerous examples of identical terminology and philosophical propositions of the *Gita* and of early Buddhist writings are to be found, although the overall character of the two teachings is clearly very different. The religious and philosophical principles incorporated in the poem stand out as the result of the priesthood's endeavour to adapt traditional Brahmanical dogmas to the needs of the new age, while at the same time taking into account the achievements of other schools of religious and philosophical thought.

The new doctrine, like other Indian religions, sees as its main task the finding and description of paths which might lead the faithful to the attainment of the "supreme religious goal"—"liberation". The specific feature of the *Gita* is that (unlike the *Upanishads* for instance) it does not simply acknowledge the "ways of liberation" (*marga*) but elaborates in detail the conception of the three paths: the way of knowledge (*jnana-marga*), the way of action (*karma-marga*) and the way of "religious (or divine) love" (*bhakti-marga*). In the *Gita* there are no unequivocal indications as to which of the three is the most important. The order in which they are enumerated would appear to stem from the fact that in the teaching concerning "divine love" the religious pathos which permeates the poem reaches its culmination. Equally important is the authors' endeavour to consolidate the cult of Bhagavata-Krishna that is directly bound up with the idea of *bhakti*—emotional attachment to this divinity.

While in its presentation of *jnana-marga* the *Gita* closely resembles the *Upanishads*, the conception of *karma-marga* in the poem is something completely original. It is precisely the proposition relating to the "way of disinterested action" that provides one of the work's basic themes, that sets the *Gita* apart from other Indian schools of religious and philosophical thought proclaiming "liberation" (*moksha* or *nirvana*) as the single goal of human existence. This particular concept is not to be found in earlier texts: it was adopted by latter-day Hindus and acknowledged as the contribution of the *Gita* to India's spiritual heritage.

Here instead of the traditional dilemma found in teachings based on the ascetic principle—should man live in the world or renounce it?—priority is given to quite a different question, namely, the nature



of activity engaged in by the individual aspiring to the "religious ideal". The answer provided in the *Gita* is exceedingly simple: action ceases to be a fetter for man, when he engages in it in a disinterested way, i.e., when he regards it as something to which he is emotionally indifferent, but which is a bounden duty. When man attains such "disinterested activity" selfish stimuli are eliminated, there is no longer any thought of acquisition to be achieved through action. Moreover in carrying out his various actions such an individual is in no way aspiring to assert his ego, he is free from an "awareness of self" (from *ahankara*).

In other words, in its elaboration of the ideal of "liberation" for the individual from the fetters of earthly life and *ahankara*, as proclaimed in the *Upanishads*, the *Gita* provides a completely different conceptual expression for that ideal. The text of the poem is essentially devoted to an elucidation of this central idea.

The "way of love for God" (*bhakti*) is developed as a doctrine in the *Gita*. The description of *bhakti* is, in a definite sense, the culmination of the poem: the ideal outlined in the *Upanishads* of a renunciation of ambivalence and awareness of self finds expression in the worship of Krishna-Bhagavata, who is represented simultaneously as a personalised god and also as an analogy of the universal Absolute—Brahman.

The social aspect of the poem's content forms part of the religious and philosophical doctrine elaborated in it. While the interpretation of questions concerning the world's existence and ways of attaining the "supreme truth" provided in the *Gita* shows the influence of a number of ideas from unorthodox teachings and a reformed version of the Brahmanism of the *Upanishads*, the model for *varna* organisation it puts forward corresponds to the archaic concepts of the Vedic age. It goes even further in that direction in that it contains substantiation for a still more rigid and close-knit *varna* system which directly determined the nature of the "classical" caste system sanctified by later-day Hinduism.

However this "strictly social aspect" of the content of the *Gita* had ceased in many respects to be significantly relevant for future generations. The *Gita* came to be seen as the concentrated expression of the ideology of reformed Brahmanism, and later of Hinduism in general. Prominent thinkers traced their own, utterly original conceptions back to it, deliberately stressing this or that particular aspect of its content. In recent times the ideas found in this poem have been incorporated into a variety of theories, some of which are completely opposed to one another. Such prominent figures of twentieth-century India as Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Aurobindo Ghosh (the latter in his capacity as a political leader, not a mystic philosopher) alluded to the ideas of the *Gita*. Jawaharlal Nehru stressed the importance of studying the ideas in the *Gita*. The *Song of the Bhagavata* has thus become an intrinsic part of the whole of

Indian culture, an undying symbol of the continuity of that heritage linking its earliest roots and the quests of the centuries that followed.

### **The Main Schools of Ancient Indian Philosophy**

Great importance was attached to philosophical knowledge in ancient India. Kautilya referred to philosophy as the light of all learning and the pillar of all rules and regulations.

In the *Upanishads* we already find signs of the conflict between the two main trends at work within the philosophical thought of ancient India—namely materialism and idealism. In the first centuries A.D. when schools of philosophy actually took shape this conflict assumed a particularly clear form. The materialist school (Lokayata, Charvaka) provided consistent and detailed elaborations of its conceptions. The flowering of philosophy in this period was made possible thanks to the major successes scored in the advance of scientific knowledge; a new stage in the historical and cultural development of ancient Indian society paved the way to it.

The study of ancient Indian philosophy shows that the thinkers in India at that time posed the same range of problems as the classical philosophers; moreover independently of each other they arrived at similar answers. In a number of cases the philosophers of ancient India reached those answers first.

### **Materialism in Ancient India and Its Schools**

In the history of Indian culture materialism has occupied a special place and has played a significant role.

The materialist tradition emerged in its most radical form in the sphere of philosophical quest; even at this early period the Indian materialist tradition was marked by the endeavour to free thought from dogmatic canons, outworn prejudices of religious fanaticism.

Written sources have preserved the names of a number of schools of materialist philosophy. The most influential of these was Lokayata; it is worth noting that the actual word used to denote this school of philosophy, means “attached to the earthly world” or “related to the people”, “found among the people” and this points clearly to the anti-idealist character of the teaching, to the wide proliferation of the ideas of the materialists of ancient India among the various strata of society in that period. The appearance of Lokayata (later the materialists came to be known mostly as the Charvakas, but this terminological difference did not reflect any fundamental differences of doctrine) marked an utterly new stage in the evolution of materialist ideas. The question as to the origins of Lokayata remains

controversial: sometimes it is linked with archaic views held by the native population, and this would explain the conflict between it and orthodox Brahmanical tradition. Indeed, some aspects of this teaching might appear to be such as would lead to a similar conclusion, however the overall character of the philosophical system reveals a high level of philosophical thought, while the fundamental tenets can in no way be reduced to primitive beliefs.

Lokayata was evidently widespread even early on and had followers both in the north and the south of the country. This is indicated both by the materialist current in the *Upanishads*, which has much in common with Lokayata ideas, and also by the references to it as such in Buddhist and Jainist writings. Kautilya referred to Lokayata as one of the three philosophical doctrines, that, in his opinion, possessed intrinsic value. There are references to representatives of this school in other ancient Indian writings, in the epics, in Patanjali's grammar, in the *Harshacharita*, etc. The actual writings of Indian materialists of the ancient period have not been preserved, having evidently been destroyed by their philosophical opponents. However an analysis of their treatises (detailed, albeit tendentious) is to be found in the works of the famous Vedanta philosopher Shankara, in the compendiums of Madhava, Jayantabhata and the Jain commentator Haribhadra. Tamil writings from the late Middle Ages provide a concise, but most pithy account of the fundamental principles of the materialist tradition in India. To judge by these texts, materialism provided the main opposition to Hindu tradition in Southern India during this period.

Thus we are not dealing here with a chance episode in the history of India's cultural development, as certain scholars have attempted to qualify it on various occasions. The evolution of this school continued over a period of almost two thousand years and the constant polemics between the materialists and the followers of philosophical movements of a religious bias testifies to the intensity of the struggle between these two main philosophical trends—the materialist and the idealist—in both the ancient period and the Middle Ages.

The first reference to the ideas of the Lokayata school is found in the *Upanishads*. The legendary founder of this school is represented as the deified sage Brihaspati, although according to the epics he often engaged in actions incompatible with the dictates of orthodox tradition. It is interesting to note that in the *Upanishads* Brihaspati proclaims a false teaching designed to undermine the Asuras by turning them away from the truth. It presents a variant of the ancient materialist text that has been lent a polemical slant by its editors. The Asuras are assured that the only essence of all living creation is the body, while the soul is nothing more than an illusion.

More detailed references to materialist teachings are found in the *Mahabharata*. Interestingly enough they are spoken by venerable sages, who were recognised by Brahmanical tradition. In the

section entitled *Mokshadharma* (from Book XII of the poem) there is among other things an exposition of the views of "Bharadvaja Guru", who comes forth here as the immediate forerunner of Lokayata philosophers. In tones of extreme scepticism he refers to the idea of the soul's existence after death, "the favourable new birth" that supposedly is secured through observance of ritual ceremonies and the bringing of offerings to the priest. Bharadvaja mocks the believer who, after giving the Brahman his cow, dreams of receiving in return all manner of boons in the next birth.

Bharadvaja contrasts the religious concepts of the transmigration of souls with the materialist notion of the natural transition of one form of life into another according to the laws at work within Nature.

Such an important step forward for rationalist, and materialist, ideas would have been unthinkable without significant progress in scientific knowledge, in particular in the fields of mathematics, physics and the natural sciences.

The concept of the elements and their role in the moulding of consciousness was bound up with achievements in specific fields of knowledge that help to explain the processes at work within Nature. The materialists stressed constantly that the object of their investigation was the world as perceived through the senses, that only being that can be analysed could be the meaningful object of scientific deductions. They denied supernatural phenomena because experimentation could not provide any evidence relating to them.

The Lokayata doctrine started out from a thesis concerning sense perception (*pratyaksha*) as the only source of real knowledge about the world (*pramana*); meanwhile it stated that assertions from those in authority, revelations or religious texts could not add anything to ideas gleaned from experience.

The Lokayata followers saw the universe as eternal and believed that its laws regulated the changes taking place in things consisting of elements. They were aware of the complex nature of the question as to the origins of life and thought and did not attempt to reduce higher forms of life to lower ones. They maintained that consciousness was the result of an extraordinarily diversified manifestation of basic elements.

The argument with which the Lokayatas countered the "*Karma* principle", universally accepted by Indian idealist thinkers, was most interesting. They asked why, if the soul is capable of transferring itself from one body to another, does not man remember his previous incarnations or if the individual is reborn in a new body after death, then why does he not attempt to assume his former aspect out of love for his relatives and beloved ones?

In their rejection of the *Karma* the Lokayatas were opposing not merely orthodox tradition, but all other philosophical and religious-philosophical movements. Their position was therefore unique in the history of thought of ancient and medieval India. The boldness of the

ideas they put forward is all the more striking in view of the fact that their main theses date back to a very early period.

The ethical principles of the materialists appeared to their opponents to be the weakest point in their doctrine. The Lokayatas were accused of attachment to inordinate pleasures, to the joys of earthly life (hedonism). This view is to be found even in many modern studies of the period. In actual fact the ethical ideas of the Lokayatas were quite different. In most of the treatises expounding the principles of the Lokayata teaching there were no appeals for amorality or unbridled behaviour (even though these treatises were written by men who opposed the teaching). The crux of their teaching is rejection of the religious ethical ideal and the concomitant nihilistic attitudes to any manifestations of joy or delight in being.

It is important to stress that the Lokayatas and Charvakas never supported selfish attitudes to the real world surrounding man. On the contrary, they saw man's normal existence as something only possible if he was at one with Nature. Moderation was seen as the prime virtue and the individual's "natural hedonism" as something held in check, or regulated by this virtue. A similar attitude was inherent in various schools of classical philosophy—particularly Epicureanism.

Unfortunately very little is known of the social views of the Charvakas. This makes the statements of Bharadvaja particularly valuable. He comes out against the *varnas* and there is reason to assume that the Lokayatas remained true to the principles of rationalist radicalism not only in their philosophy, but also with regard to social questions.

In general the differences in the fundamental principles of the two traditions—materialist and idealist—were so basic that each side would not endeavour to obscure the principles of the opposing side, but on the contrary overstated them in order to emphasise their unacceptability to their side. The materialists not only rejected the authority of the *Vedas* but also the ideal of religious (to be precise, mystical) salvation, the idea of the transmigration of souls and the law of the *Karma*. The bold approach, which this represented, can be seen most clearly of all from the fact that neither the Jainas nor the Buddhists, despite their negative view of Brahmanist ideology, could bring themselves to call into question either of these theses. The next step from this rejection was the rejection of all kinds of ritual and veneration for a god (not only Vedic ones); moreover these outward forms of religiosity were now criticised not as being "primitive" as compared to the more analytical exposition of religious truth, but they were rejected altogether.

The Indian materialists can be seen to have been consistent in their radicalism and their readiness to combat any time-honoured prejudices in either the philosophical or the social sphere. Despite opposition from powerful adversaries (the orthodox Brahmins not only monopolised the right to "preserve texts", so important in a

country where manuscripts that were not recopied were likely to decompose rapidly because of the climate, but also endeavoured to maintain their hold on the "levers" of social power), the materialist tradition continued in India for many centuries. Its influence on other trends in Indian thought was enormous. Ancient Indian materialist thought played an important part in the history of world philosophy: its tenets, the boldness and depth of its approach, were not only on a par with the achievements of classical philosophers but often outstripped them.

### **The Six Darshanas. The Sankhya**

The philosophy associated with Hinduism is traditionally divided into six *darshanas* or schools. The feature they share which determines their religious association is their acknowledgement of the authority of the *Vedas*, the law of the *Karma* and belief in the "ultimate (i.e., mystical) liberation" as the main goal of man's existence. These systems differ considerably: many of the philosophical concepts they incorporate vary, indeed they are often even opposed to each other.

The origin and nature of Sankhya philosophy is a complicated question. Discussion as to the true nature of this school of philosophy has been going on for close on a hundred and fifty years and extreme views are voiced on this subject: the Sankhya is presented as a religious, mystical teaching and also as a materialist doctrine. This divergence can be explained first and foremost by the fact that in its classical form the Sankhya emerges as an expression of philosophical dualism.

The Sankhya came into being at a very early stage. Only a few of the *Upanishads* precede it and it provides a fuller expression of the spontaneous materialism of that distant age. Kautilya referred to "three philosophies"—the Sankhya, the Yoga and the Lokayata. Badarayana's *Brahma Sutra* (an early Vedanta work of the second century B.C.) attacks certain of its propositions. During the Mauryan period the Sankhya was probably already an independent system that played a significant role in the intellectual life of ancient India.

The foundation of this system is traditionally attributed to the sage Kapila. The *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* (V.2) mentions a certain "red rishi" (*kapila* means dark red) but it is far from definite that he was actually the founder of the school. The following compromise solution to the problem is now the most commonly accepted in academic circles: the first or one of the first to formulate these ideas was indeed called Kapila, however it is impossible to establish whether the Kapila referred to in the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* is the same one. His works and those of his pupils, Asura and Pan-chashikha, have not survived although there is no doubt that these

three writers were real and not fictional figures. Asura's name is encountered several times in the epics, Ishvarakrishna's *Sankhya-karika* mentions Panchashikha, whom the author of the treatise referred to as his predecessor.

Ishvarakrishna's work that appears to date to the fourth-fifth centuries A.D. is a re-working of the original form of the teaching. This is confirmed if we compare the text of the *Karika* with remarks about the Sankhya in earlier treatises (for example in Badarayana's writing) and also from references in Buddhist works. Unlike the vast majority of philosophical works in India that were not linked with Buddhism the *Sankhya-karika* was translated into Chinese and became known to the Mahayanists.

It is difficult to form any precise picture of the original Sankhya teaching. The most useful key is provided by Badarayana's *Brahma Sutra*. Badarayana as an opponent of early Sankhya teaching provides a consistent account of those of its specific characteristics which conflicted with the ideas of the Vedantist school and other related currents of thought in Indian philosophy, that were elaborating the idealist concepts of the *Upanishads*. The author of the *Brahma Sutra* defines the Sankhya as "pradhana-karana-vada" (the teaching on Nature as the universal source) or "achetana-karana-vada" (the teaching that the foundation of the world is something without consciousness, i.e., matter or Nature). He stressed that both principles were quite unacceptable for the Vedantists who held the Brahman, or "pure consciousness" to be the initial cause of the world.

Badarayana saw Sankhya philosophy as the main opposing side to Vedanta probably in view of the influence which it enjoyed and its conceptual incompatibility with his own beliefs. He believed that if the propositions of the Sankhya were repudiated, then all materialist theories without exception would be robbed of their foundation. On this matter Shankara was in agreement with him. In his detailed commentary of the various sections of the *Brahma Sutra* dealing with the Sankhya, he maintained that for the Vedantists a triumph over this particular teaching would mean a triumph over other opponents. The teaching concerning *pradhana* (matter or Nature) as the initial cause of the world, provided, in Shankara's eyes, a universal theoretical foundation for any atomistic ideas whatsoever. Many texts (those in which an orthodox pro-Brahman line predominated) contained no references to the Sankhya, but their marked reluctance to refer to either that teaching or the Lokayata can be explained by the fact that those two teachings were seen as closely related to each other. The main thesis of the Sankhya school lies in the assertion that the material initial cause of the world—the *prakriti* or *pradhana*—had existed since time began and was not influenced by any factors outside itself. Insofar as the word *prakriti* means Nature, this term was usually translated as Nature when occurring in Sankhya texts. However, a number of scholars have demonstrated convincingly that

a more exact translation would be "matter", for in the treatise the word *mula-prakriti* (primordial Nature) is used on a par with *prakriti* which stresses the universality of *prakriti* as the original source of all forms of being.

The latter is found in two forms: *vyakta* (manifest) and *avyakta* (non-manifest). These concepts adopted from the *Upanishads* are interpreted in a different light in the Sankhya. Whereas in the *Upanishads* the "manifest", i.e., the world of that which can be perceived via the senses and which from a philosophical point of view is unreal, is contrasted with the "non-manifest", i.e., that which is inaccessible to the senses but embodies the only reality—the Absolute (the Brahman), in the Sankhya teaching two equally real forms of existence of matter are described: the "manifest" (Nature) is presented as the totality of concrete, spontaneously perceived things, while the "non-manifest", reflecting the very principle of the world's materiality, is seen as present to an equal degree in any thing. The "non-manifest" is the potential receptacle of all possible forms. The process of the world's creation finds expression precisely in the disintegration of this "primordial whole" into non-material and material forms that differ from the initial cause no more than articles of pottery differ from the clay out of which they are made.

Yet how do the formation of the world and its subsequent changes proceed? In order to understand the answer to this question provided in the Sankhya, we need to dwell on the theory of causality elaborated by the philosophers of this school, a theory which came to be known as *sat-karya-vada* (the teaching concerning the presence of effect in the cause giving rise to that effect). According to them, if effect were not present in cause, it would emerge from nothing as it were, i.e., each new phenomenon would require the intervention of a supernatural element. Indeed, any particular action can only stem from a specific initial cause: curds are produced from milk, fabric from yarn, etc. Moreover each new thing to emerge retains a link with the cause that shaped it: the weight of a table is equal to the weight of the wood used to fashion it, the weight of a jug is equal to that of the clay used to make it. However, a simple acknowledgement of the presence of effect in cause would mean that the world is something fixed and static, incapable of change: all effects would have to manifest themselves immediately and simultaneously. The teachers of the Sankhya school made it clear that effect is potentially present in cause, in a concealed form, and that a number of concrete conditions are required for it to be realised. The actual transition of cause into effect is mediated by a host of secondary circumstances which alone are capable of revealing the possibilities contained in the cause.

In the medieval compendium of philosophical writings from different schools, the work of Madhava, the *Sarvadarshana sangraha* mentions two theories of causality elaborated in India during the



ancient period and the Middle Ages: the *parinama-vada* (teaching concerning the reality of the transformation of cause into effect) and the *vivarta-vada* (teaching of the illusory nature of effect).

The first theory is associated with the Sankhya, the second with the Vedantists. These teachings are commonly classified as two answers to the question as to the nature of the relationship between cause and effect. Here once again the Sankhya philosophers defended the materialist approach, seeing the transformation of one set of phenomena into another as a real process with a material foundation. The Vedantists, on the other hand, took an idealist view of this question, since they only regarded the Absolute (the Brahman) as genuinely extant, while things and their modifications they saw as nothing more than an illusion.

Another cornerstone of Sankhya teaching was its theory of evolution presenting matter as something which originally existed in an integral "non-manifest" form. Its transformation into a world of objects and beings accessible to our senses, is effected through three *gunas* or the three "reals", the combinations of which determine the movement and development of the universe. The names of the *gunas* reflect their nature: *Tamas* (darkness), *Rajas* (passion) and *Sattva* (essence, truth). The most important of these, *Rajas* embodied the principle of energy and activity, *Tamas* that of inertia and *Sattva*, consciousness, equanimity and tranquillity. A reference to the three reals or "qualities of existence" is found as early as the *Upanishads*, however in the Sankhya teaching the concept is lent a fundamentally new significance. The reals are associated with the central principle of the teaching—the material nature of the world's initial cause. The *guna* is seen as the "thread" or "cord", the "quality" or "virtue". The incorporation of two different concepts ("cord" and "quality") in one word gave rise to those metaphors which the founders of the teaching used to elucidate the already familiar "theory of the *gunas*". The *prakriti* was likened to a rope woven from three strands. They taught, that any thing inevitably incorporated all three *gunas* at the same time, while the ratio of the three components changed, depending upon the way in which matter manifested itself.

The difference between the "early" Sankhya and the "classical" variety can only be conjectured at, yet the available evidence suggests that the materialist aspect of the teaching was particularly well developed in the early teaching. It would however be a crude vulgarisation to declare the Sankhya teaching as a whole to be materialist. The dualism inherent in the doctrine comes particularly clearly to the fore in Ishvarakrishna's treatise.

Here we encounter on a par with the *prakriti*, that creates and shapes the world, the *purusha*—pure consciousness—which is independent of the *prakriti*. There is reason to believe that *purusha* as presented in the Sankhya teaching can be traced back to the *Upanishads*.

The *purusha* is not action, its essence is contemplation. It is present in all things and they come to exist only thanks to the presence of the *purusha*. It is elusive and defies cognition, yet it is present in any, even the most insignificant, material thing. The joining together of the *purusha* and the *prakriti* (the spirit with Nature) gives rise to twenty-three elements, that is, the primordial forms of existence, which, according to the Sankhya, include both purely spiritual essences (such as intellect) and also those that are utterly material (water, earth, air, etc.). The dualism of the Sankhya teaching also made itself felt in its attempt to combine an almost materialist idea of "Nature's independent movement" (the presence of the *purusha* is implied in each of its manifestations) with the ideal of religious liberation, which accords entirely with the orthodox tradition of the *Upanishads*. The Sankhya proclaims that only after apprehending the natural movement of things can man come to understand the limitless supremacy of the constant, unchanging spirit over changing, unstable material Nature. Following on from this idea came the appeal for self-absorption and meditation.

In an attempt to explain the existence side by side of *prakriti* and the *purusha* Ishvarakrishna resorted to the following metaphor: *prakriti* is represented as a blind man able to move about and *purusha* as a man endowed with sight but unable to move. In this way the proponents of "classical" Sankhya attempted to bring together the earlier materialist conception of the existence of Nature with the idea of some kind of spiritual substance existing side by side with Nature.

The fact that the Sankhya is referred to in the *Arthashastra*, the *Brahma Sutra*, the epic poems, Charaka's medical treatise and in the *Manava Dharmashastra* shows that the teaching had become widespread in the early years of our era.

The Sankhya teaching exerted an enormous influence on both secular culture and on various religious movements. The materialist element was gradually ousted from the teaching, yet the school's central idea was nevertheless still clearly expressed, namely the rejection of a supreme Absolute in any form whatever and the highly consistent rejection of any idea of a personalised anthropomorphic divinity.

The idea first put forward in the Sankhya teaching of a "primordial nature" (*prakriti*) capable of systematic self-development represented a major contribution to the emergence of an all-Indian materialist tradition in ancient times and the Middle Ages.

### **The Yoga**

Among the *darshanas* a special place is assigned to Yoga. Usually this word conveys a series of physical exercises designed to set man into a trance-like state, or simply a type of gymnastics aimed at bringing out the body's latent physical potentialities and enhancing

man's control over his mental state (the term was adopted precisely with this last sense in Europe in the nineteenth century). In actual fact however Yoga is a well-developed philosophical teaching possessing highly original components all of its own.

Classical Yoga is seen as dating from Patanjali's treatise the *Yoga-sutra*, which contains all the basic propositions of the teaching. They were later developed in a host of subsequent writings, for example in Vyasa's commentary on the *Yoga-sutra* entitled *Vyasa-bhashya* (fourth century), in Vachaspati's *Tattvavaisharadi* (ninth century). They elaborated the terminology of the Yoga school and provided information important for an understanding of certain excerpts from this *Sutra*.

The Sankhya and Yoga schools are traditionally regarded as complementary systems in India. Indeed, many of the propositions of the Sankhya school (dualism, the teaching concerning the twenty-five elements, etc.) are also accepted by the Yoga school. Nevertheless Yoga philosophers were inclined to regard these as secondary aspects of their doctrine, while they concentrated their attention on psychology, the theory of knowledge and practical methods for achieving psychophysical control over the body. In addition, the Yoga philosophers announced theirs to be a theistic school, a claim not made by the Sankhya school.

The interpretation of psychological categories is considered to be the most important contribution made by Yoga to the history of Indian philosophy. The most vital of these is *chitta* (the mind or rather the concentration of all potentially possible forms of man's mental activity). According to Patanjali, *chitta* is an empirical fact, although it expresses something more than the simple reproduction of specific states of the individual. It is assumed that its inner nature remains unchanged, and all manifestations of the individual's psyche are no more than modifications. The *chitta* acts and lives in accordance with the real laws of the material world's existence. However the states of man accessible to direct observation are seen as its distorted development, as deviation from one's own original essence. Practically manifested mental conditions are referred to as *kleshas* (constraint, suffering): it is assumed that the original and indefinable condition of being for the *chitta* consists in freedom from these.

Patanjali lists five *kleshas*; moreover the nature of his list and the order followed provide a fairly clear picture of the overall idea behind the system. The "list" opens with *avidya* (ignorance) that finds expression in man's predisposition to see the inconstant as constant, and the transitory as eternal. Here the basic principle of the idealist trend found in the *Upanishads* is transferred to the sphere of the individual's psychology: the visible multitude and the material nature of external objects is illusory, only what is single, unified and intangible is real. The *Asmita* is the equation of the ego with man's physical body and his individual psychological attributes. This

reflects a trend that can be traced back to the *Upanishads*—the contrasting of the “cosmic soul of the universe” (*Atman Brahman*) with the concrete ego of the individual. The third *klesha*—*raga*—consists in a thirst for pleasures, delights and success in life. It is countered by *dvesha*—hatred for everything which stands in the way of pleasure. At the end of the list comes *abhinivesha*, an instinctive love of life and fear of losing it.

The theory of knowledge elaborated in Patanjali’s work is also distinguished by a number of original ideas. On coming into contact with the external world (objective reality according to the *Yoga-sutra* exists outside man too—here it would appear the influence of the Sankhya makes itself felt: only “liberation” means at the same time an end to existence and Nature and the ego apprehending objective reality), the *chitta* evolves its own ways of cognising the same. Yoga philosophers elaborate in detail the principles for defining the similarities and differences between things and phenomena. The logical workings of human consciousness make it possible to establish at first elementary analogies, and later more complex patterns of development of material phenomena.

Of central importance for Patanjali and his followers are rules for a psychological discipline for the individual that has a religious orientation, the so-called eightfold path of Yoga. The description of the techniques facilitating the mastering of these “means of ascent” takes up most of all Yoga treatises.

The philosophical doctrine of Yoga culminates in descriptions of the “absolute being” holding sway over the world (*Ishvara*). He is possessed of all “perfections” and assists the faithful in the attainment of the “supreme goal”. It is revealing to note that in Patanjali’s writing there are few references to *Ishvara*, and that such excerpts as do refer to him stand aloof, as it were, rather than form an integral part of the treatise. Early Yoga which subscribed to the cosmological views of the Sankhya virtually left no room for the activity of a personalised god. In a number of excerpts it is even maintained that *Ishvara* is no more than the object of religious emotions and possesses no ontological significance. However it should be pointed out that the adherents of that school of philosophy paid homage to a personalised god, which brought their views more on a par with orthodox tradition and the practical aspects of the Hindu cult.

All in all study of this original philosophical system makes it possible to elucidate more effectively the complex development of the correlations between the various trends in the philosophical thought of ancient India. At the same time it brings out the close link between philosophy and the achievements of certain scientific disciplines: “the eightfold path of Yoga” could not have come into being without advances in the spheres of anatomy, physiology and psychology.

## The Nyaya and Vaisheshika Schools

These two philosophical systems which emerged in the first century A.D. and had taken definitive shape by the Gupta period were closely linked with each other, and this was no mere coincidence. They both tended towards a rationalist explanation for natural phenomena although the first school paid particular attention to problems of gnosiology and was preoccupied with logic as an instrument of cognition (later the word *nyaya* was used to denote logic); the second was more concerned with doctrines concerning being and the essences that constitute being. The thinkers from these schools never indulged in polemics against each other: the Nyayas accepted the metaphysics of the Vaisheshika school, for they regarded it as a natural continuation of their own theory of knowledge.

The philosophical system initially elaborated by the Vaisheshikas constituted an integral part of the rationalist tradition in India. However it differed from the Lokayata doctrine insofar as it later admitted of a large number of particularised and most significant concessions to idealism and theism.

The word Vaisheshika is derived from the Sanskrit word *vishesha* (particularity, or variety) which makes the name of this school correspond closely to the essence of the doctrine itself. The crux of this teaching is the correlation of what is general and what is particular. Its adherents viewed the general and the concrete as components of a single system for the elucidation of being; at the same time, the particular was established as something immediately perceptible, and the general as the result of the totality of data concerning the former processed by man's reason. This meant that the central issue for this school of philosophers was how to combine the particular and the multiple, how to make the transition from an actually perceptible object to generalising categories that served to elucidate being as a whole. Solutions put forward by this school do not always appear scientifically valid but the materialist point of departure for these searchings did not raise any doubts in that far-distant era too.

According to the founder of the school Kanada the world arose as a result of the interaction of atoms that had not been created by anyone but were eternal, indestructible. This central thesis makes it impossible to evaluate the Vaisheshika teaching as a theistic system, although later commentators of Kanada's writings attempted to find acknowledgement of the existence of god in them and also recognition of his intervention in the regular processes at work within nature. Atoms are divided into four groups, possessing the qualities of the four elements, and the various combinations in which they are linked together give rise to all inanimate objects and living creatures. The term *Dharma* is used in this context but not in the sense of category linked with moral or religious prescriptions, but as the most general

designation for the laws of natural development and relations of cause and effect. He starts out from the traditional principle of "cyclical cosmogony" (the world comes into being, develops and then perishes in the "universal catastrophe", after which the whole process begins again) but he presents it as something almost reminiscent of natural philosophy: atoms do not disappear at the moment of world catastrophe, all that happens is that the links between them are broken, those links which gave rise to the phenomena perceived by man. The rebirth of the universe moreover takes place as a result of a repeated linking together of atoms and proceeds without any intervention on the part of a divinity.

In contrast to the assertions made by representatives of the orthodox religio-philosophical schools Kanada proclaims that the processes at work within Nature are not connected in any way with the actions of "supranatural" beings. Admittedly he at no time actually denies the idea of god outright, however even scholars who adhered to idealist principles were obliged to point out that this should be regarded as an "outward" compromise with the propositions of religious tradition. Yet, in actual fact, the inner logic of the philosophical system elaborated by this outstanding thinker is really atheistic (insofar as it denies god as the creator of the world).

One of the main tenets of Kanada's teaching is that concerned with substance (*dravya*). It serves to express this or that aspect of the world's existence that emerges as the product of Nature's development starting from an elementary linking-together of atoms. The introduction of this category was most significant in that ancient period and in the Middle Ages since it represented an attempt to provide a solution to the question of the mechanisms through which the simple is transformed into the more complex, and the processes at work within the world are regulated. Substance is an objective fact independent of everything, which acts upon other substances and separate things (secondary outcomes of a particular substance or a combination of several substances) and is indestructible: "it is not demolished by cause or by effect". Kanada writes: "Substance can be defined in the following words: it is capable of action and possesses properties, and it is intrinsic to cause." Then he goes on to say: "Substance is the general cause of things, properties and actions", i.e., it has no origin outside itself (or to be more precise apart from the combinations of atoms that form it); it can move of its own accord and can therefore give rise to effects; their totality resulting from the activity of many substances constitutes the world.

Early Vaisheshika writings ignore the idea of the "universal soul" (*Paramatman*) and only acknowledge the idea of "individual spiritual substance" (*Atman*). In later writings the concept of *Paramatman*, adopted from Vedanta teaching, becomes part of the overall teaching. However all these distortions of the original essence of the doctrine

did not affect the materialist trend of the Vaisheshika school and the Nyaya theory of knowledge.

The significance of these schools in the history of Indian thought lies above all in the rare degree of emphasis laid upon questions of logic and epistemology. The first extant writing which provides a systematic exposition of knowledge in this sphere—Gautama's treatise, the *Nyaya-sutra*—demonstrates the extremely high level at which these logical categories have been elaborated.

Gautama took as his point of departure the reality of the external world, its independence of the subject, and the fundamental cognizability of the universe through the senses, that find their logical synthesis in the mind. The central issue in the Nyaya doctrine was expressed in the laws of "clear thinking". Images that take shape in the memory, single observations and assumptions are insufficient to provide an adequate conception of objects. The true criterion of their authenticity can only be provided through their correspondence to the testimony of experience. Only those communications of experience that have been "passed through" logical analysis can reveal the authentic essence of objects and phenomena.

The Nyaya teaching concerning the methods and ways of cognition, particularly those involving logic, is elaborated in great detail.

In his circumstantial comparison of the Nyaya syllogism with Aristotle's three-line syllogism which provided an essential element of Western logic, F. I. Shcherbatskoy called attention to the various parallels to be discerned in the evolution of logical categories in Greece and India and he found many features of Nyaya logic most interesting as pointers to the general laws underlying the emergence and crystallisation of these categories.

The contribution made by this school of philosophy to the creation and elaboration of logic as a separate field of knowledge was most considerable; it exerted an important and fruitful influence on Indian science as a whole, as was to come to light particularly clearly in the latter period of its development. The achievements of the Nyaya school laid the foundation for the development of the teaching of the outstanding logicians of ancient and early medieval India, Dinnaga and Dharmakirti.

Kanada's atomistic theory partly resembled similar ideas propounded by the Greeks, in particular Empedocles. The latter also recognised four elements (and moreover the same ones: earth, water, fire and air) and traced the world's diversity to combinations of these "eternal essences". Empedocles explained the formation of things by the mechanical linking together and disjoining of primordial particles and he distinguished conditionally between two opposing forces, those of love and hate. The periodic breaking up of matter into its component elements and its reconstitution in the process of their interaction Empedocles presented as dependent on the predominance of one or the other of the two above-mentioned "principles". This

proposition can readily be compared to the Vaisheshikas' thesis concerning the cyclical character of Nature's being, although the Greek philosopher did not extend the principle of periodic disappearance and renewal to the whole of the world that can be apprehended via the senses.

A certain similarity can also be traced between the Vaisheshika teaching and that of Democritus: he also traced material processes to the movement and interaction of indivisible particles or atoms. However Democritus' ideas differed from the teaching of the Vaisheshikas insofar as he saw atoms as absolutely homogeneous; he held that the differences between their various combinations were not qualitative but purely a matter of quantity. This analogy between the teaching of the Vaisheshikas and the views of the greatest representative of Greek materialism is most significant. It does not of course point to any direct influence exerted by India on the Greeks, but rather to certain parallels in the development of philosophical thought in the two civilisations.

### Mimamsa

The traditional list of the six *darshanas* always ends with the names of the Mimamsa and Vedanta schools. These were so closely linked that Vedanta is sometimes referred to as Uttara-Mimamsa ("Higher" or "Later" Mimamsa), while Mimamsa teaching itself was often designated as Purva, or original Mimamsa. However in actual fact there are significant differences between the two systems both as regards their fundamental principles and also the general spirit of their doctrines. It is impossible to determine which of the two schools of philosophy came into being first: all that can be established beyond any doubt is that their merging together into a single tradition took place in the late Middle Ages by which time Vedanta had come to predominate.

The Mimamsa school attempted to refer back consistently to the Vedas; in this endeavour it showed a reluctance to accept any compromise solutions, even more so than orthodox Hindu theology. It saw the texts of the Vedic collections—the *samhitās*—as the basis of all knowledge. Like many other Indian religions or philosophical systems the Mimamsa school was profoundly practical, but this emphasis on practice was of a very special type. The central issue of this philosophical system was concerned with the principles and patterns of ritual, correct ceremonies for worship. In its elaboration of this idea the Mimamsa school represents an essential deviation from the true spirit of the Vedic tradition. In the *Vedas* sacrifices were offered for the sake of the gods, while for the Mimamsa school gods existed for the sake of sacrifice. They cease to be the sovereigns of Nature, intervening in the movement of the elements and the life of men; they are no more than an essential link in the ritual pattern, for



without them the offering of sacrifice would cease to mean anything. It is therefore natural that in the Mimamsa texts pride of place goes to detailed and often casuistic interpretations of certain ritual prescriptions from the *Vedas* and *Brahmanas*.

An important aspect of Mimamsa philosophy, despite its prevailing preoccupation with religious problems, is its teaching with regard to knowledge. Jaimini, who is considered the founder of the Mimamsa school, includes among the six sources of "clear knowledge" (or *pramana*) testimony of the authority, i.e., the Vedic texts (*shabda*), however the other four sources listed in his treatise, the *Mimamsa-sutra*, are not linked with the school's overall religious orientation. These are perception via the senses, logical deduction, comparison and proposition.

While Nyaya teaching, generally speaking, uses deductive methods in relation to the idea of analogy, the Mimamsa school upholds the inductive method. The Mimamsa teaching which is orthodox in its ideals and the Nyaya teaching which is in many respects "heretical" treat one and the same issue, polemicising against each other in the process. This aspect of dispute is inherent in the Mimamsa school no less than in the others already discussed. The Mimamsa treatises are full of critical outbursts directed against their philosophical rivals.

The Mimamsakas (the followers of the Mimamsa school) introduce the idea of "proposition" or to be more precise "postulation". Its significance lies in the fact that if some phenomenon or other appears to us to be without cause, then we are forced to resort to indirect explanations for it, analysis of which enables us by means of elimination eventually to probe down to its true cause. So here for the first time in Indian thought there takes shape the idea of hypothesis and its role in the process of cognition. Admittedly, postulation (*arthapatti*) cannot be entirely identified with "hypothesis", insofar as "postulation" as used here denotes not assumption, but indisputable conclusion.

Also worthy of note is that the general view of the world upheld by the Mimamsa school was marked by a definite element of realism: the objective existence of the universe and its cognizability are not questioned, although Jaimini came out actively against not only the materialists but also against the Sankhya.

This realism of the Mimamsa school was particularly important in view of the fact that the system, unlike those treated earlier in this chapter, unconditionally adhered to the ritual principles of the *Vedas*. It is revealing to note that the then general tendency to investigate the veracity of traditional concepts and the endeavour to subject these to critical analysis made an impact even on such a profoundly orthodox teaching as that of the Mimamsa school.

## Vedanta

In the Middle Ages the influence of the Vedanta school was to become predominant, however this did not mean that it came into being later than the other *darshanas*: the first purely Vedanta work, the *Brahma-sutra*, attributed to the sage Badarayana, dates from the second century B.C. The Vedantists themselves were inclined to demonstrate that their teaching could be traced back to the *Upanishads*, the texts of which they regarded as the original source of all their philosophical constructions. The tendentiousness of this view is self-evident. Moreover Badarayana's treatise itself, which consists of a collection of short and not always comprehensible sayings, presents the main points of the teaching rather than reveals its specific nature. However, Badarayana expressed in that work the cardinal principle of the Vedanta teaching although it is brought out mainly by means of negative theses: the world is in no way derived from material forces: the only reality is Brahman (here, spiritual essence), and all that really is stems from it in all its forms. Typically enough the author of the *Brahma-sutra* who supports an extreme idealist point of view reacted sensitively to the materialist ideas of his age: this accounts for the polemical sharpness of the propositions directed against the Sankhya and the Lokayata schools.

The inordinate laconicism of Badarayana's writing naturally furthered the development of the commentatorial tradition: at the very dawn of the Middle Ages Gaudapada wrote the first of the commentaries on this doctrine that has been handed down to the present day. Later the Vedanta school split up into different movements, each named after their founder. These were the Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, Vallabha and Nimbarka. Each of these thinkers wrote his fundamental work in the form of a commentary (*bhashya*) to Badarayana's treatise. However, only two of them—Shankara and Ramanuja—were actually to exert a significant influence on the evolution of the Vedanta teaching.

A large number of philosophical writings by Shankara (eighth century) and Ramanuja (twelfth century) have survived. According to Shankara's doctrine the world is an illusion born of the Absolute: material Nature is unreal, just as is the empirical "ego". Only Atman—a projection, as it were, of the Absolute—Brahman—affects the imaginary psychophysical complex which in everyday language is referred to as the human personality. The centuries-old dispute between the two main trends within the Vedanta movement can for all intents and purposes be reduced to questions of religious practice and mysticism: while Shankara regarded as correct and true only the "way of knowledge" (i.e., the understanding of the illusory nature of one's own being against the background of the universal and all-embracing reality of Brahman) and as a result upheld the idea that the "ego" and

"Atman-Brahman" were completely identical, Ramanuja, who upheld the "path of religious love" saw as the ultimate ideal the merging of the individual principle with the divinity, a merging in which the believer only comes into contact with the object of his faith, but does not become equal to it.

Shankara advocated all-embracing idealist monism and reduced or condensed the diverse phenomena of the external world to self-expression of the "cosmic Absolute"—Brahman. Gradually Shankara's teaching was equated to Vedanta teaching as a whole. Orthodox Hinduism proclaimed the teaching of that philosopher as its official doctrine.

Although the Vedanta school at a certain period became the predominant movement, this did not do away with the fact that it was only one of the traditional philosophical systems. Indeed various other movements with more ancient roots propagated new ideas. The external predominance of the Vedanta teaching did not rule out the broad influence of other schools, particularly the Vaisheshika and the Sankhya teaching.

## THE CULTURE OF THE KUSHANA AND GUPTA PERIODS

### Drama and Literature

Unfortunately only a small number of literary texts dating from the Kushana period have survived to the present day. Our knowledge of the development of Sanskrit literature in the early centuries A.D. is based on writings from the Gupta period. However, tradition associates the work of Ashvaghosha—an outstanding writer and playwright, one of the founders of Buddhist Sanskrit literature and a major philosopher—with the reign of Kanishka (the early second century A.D.). Many of his works remain unknown, but fragments of the following poems in Sanskrit have been preserved: *Buddhacharita* ("A Life of the Buddha"; the whole text has been preserved for posterity in Chinese and Tibetan translations), *Saundarananda* (Sundari and Nanda) and the drama *Shariputraprakarana* (A Drama Dealing with Shariputra's Conversion to Buddhism). In ancient India these works of Ashvaghosha's had enjoyed wide popularity, and the Chinese pilgrim I Tsing, who visited India in the seventh century, wrote that the "poem" so gladdened the heart of the reader that he never tired of repeating it over and over again.

Although the *Buddhacharita* and the *Shariputraprakarana* treated only Buddhist themes and propagated the teaching of Buddha they possessed poetic and artistic qualities. Ashvaghosha adheres to the epic tradition and his characters' lives are filled with drama and rich emotional experience.

In his plays Ashvaghosha lays the foundation of ancient Indian drama which was to come into its own in the works of such writers as Bhasa, Kalidasa and Shudraka. Thirteen plays are attributed to Bhasa but it is as yet difficult to establish which of these really were written by this remarkable dramatist. Bhasa also made use of the epic tradition, although his plays were constructed strictly according to the laws of classical drama. Some modern scholars maintain, and with ample grounds, that a number of the plays attributed to Bhasa are the most ancient models of Indian tragedy. This was, there is no doubt, a bold innovation on the part of Bhasa who thus defied established artistic canon. This trend in ancient Indian drama was developed by Shudraka, author of the play *Mrichchhakatika* (The Little Clay Cart), which tells of the ardent love of an impoverished merchant for a hetaera.

One of the pearls of ancient Indian literature is the work of Kalidasa (late fourth-early fifth century), poet and dramatist, whose writings represent an illustrious page in the history of world culture. Translations of Kalidasa's works penetrated to the West at the end of the eighteenth century and were rapturously received right from the outset. In Russia part of Kalidasa's play *Shakuntala* was translated by Nikolai Karamzin in 1792-1793. In the preface to this publication Karamzin wrote that the play contained poetry of outstanding beauty and was an example of the highest art.

It would appear that Kalidasa was a prolific writer but as yet scholars have only discovered three plays: *Shakuntala*, *Malavikagnimitra*, *Vikramorvashi* (Urvashi Won by Valour), the poem *Meghaduta* (the Cloud Messenger) and two epic poems: the *Kumara-sambhava* (the Birth of Kumara) and *Raghuvamsha* (Raghu's Line).

The core of all Kalidasa's writings is man and his emotions, his worldly concerns, his joys and sorrows. His work already represents a significant step forward in comparison with the writings of Ashvaghosha who depicted an idealised image of Buddha and his faithful disciples. Many of Kalidasa's heroes are kings: the poet not only extolled their exploits, but he also condemned their ignoble deeds. Some of Kalidasa's works bear witness to the advance of the epic poem, the so-called *mahakavya*. Both in his plays and poems Kalidasa uses highly dramatic subjects, while his descriptions of Nature and man's emotions are distinguished by their lyric quality and humanism. Without swerving from earlier traditions Kalidasa stood out as an innovator in many respects. This explains why his work has been so accessible to the minds and hearts of the peoples of India throughout many centuries.

In ancient India considerable advances were also made by the theatre. In the Gupta age special treatises concerning dramatic art started to appear, which provided detailed expositions of the aims of the theatre and theatrical entertainments, the various genres used in the theatre, etc.

One of these treatises has been handed down to the present day. Entitled the *Natyashastra*, it is attributed to Bharata and held by scholars to have been written in the early centuries A.D. It is aptly referred to as the encyclopaedia of the ancient Indian theatre. It treats various questions connected with dramatic art—theatre architecture, acting, types of dramatic works, music, staging, etc.

When ancient Indian plays first made their way to Europe, many scholars wrote that the Indian theatre owed its roots to ancient Greece. However it has since emerged beyond any doubt that the theatre in India came into being quite independently. Moreover, the Indian theatrical tradition goes further back than that of ancient Greece and is much richer as far as theory is concerned.

In the Gupta age the earliest of the *Puranas* were compiled. These collections of legends about gods, kings and heroes that embody the mythological and cosmological ideas of the ancient Indians were compiled over a very long period and subjected to far-reaching editing and modification.

Some of the *Dharmashastras* such as the *Laws of Yajnavalkya* (third century A.D.) or the *Laws of Narada* (fourth and fifth centuries A.D.) also date from the early centuries A.D. Worthy of note among the landmarks of Sanskrit literature is the *Panchatantra* (third and fourth centuries A.D.), a collection of tales and parables which is very popular both in India and beyond its borders. In the early Middle Ages translations of this work appeared in Pehlevi, Syriac and Arabic. In the Middle East the collection was known as *Kalila and Dimna*. Later the work became known in Europe and all in all the influence of the *Panchatantra* on both Eastern and Western literature was considerable.

It was also in the Gupta period that the first works of literature from Southern India written in Tamil appeared. One of the most famous of these early works in Tamil was the *Kural*—a collection of parables the compilation of which is traditionally ascribed to a representative of the farmers' caste, Tiruvalluvar. The *Kural* was undoubtedly based on material derived from folklore and already in ancient times won enormous popularity. In the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. collections of lyrical poems in Tamil also appeared. The literature of other South Indian peoples appeared later, in the early Middle Ages.

### Scientific Advance

The first centuries A.D. were marked by major scientific achievement. This was particularly true of such fields as mathematics, astronomy, medicine and chemistry. Scientific treatises relating to a number of disciplines appeared. Requirements of the economy did a good deal to promote the advance of mathematics. Mathematics was important in relation to the construction of religious edifices, and for purposes of worship.

In the ancient period and in the early Middle Ages lived the outstanding mathematicians Aryabhata (fifth and early sixth centuries), Varahamihira (sixth century) and Brahmagupta (late sixth and early seventh centuries), whose discoveries anticipated many scientific achievements of modern times. Aryabhata knew that  $\pi$  equalled 3.1416. The theorem known to us as Pythagoras' theorem was also known at that time. Aryabhata proposed an original solution in whole numbers to the linear equation with two unknowns that closely resembles modern solutions.

The ancient Indians evolved a system for calculation using zero, which was later taken over by the Arabs (the so-called Arabic numerals) and later from them by other peoples. The Aryabhata school was also familiar with sine and cosine.

Aryabhata's follower, Brahmagupta, put forward solutions for a whole series of equations.

Indian scholars of this period also scored important successes in the sphere of astronomy. Certain astronomical treatises of this period have been preserved, and these *siddhantas* bear witness to the high level of astronomical knowledge attained by the ancient Indians.

Scholars of the Gupta period were already acquainted with the movement of the heavenly bodies, the reasons for eclipses of the Sun and the Moon. Aryabhata put forward a brilliant thesis with regard to the Earth's rotation on its axis.

Brahmagupta (many centuries before Newton) suggested that objects fall to the ground as a result of terrestrial gravity.

Interesting material relating to astronomy, geography and mineralogy is found in Varahamihira's work *Brihat-samhita*.

Knowledge of the laws of chemistry was important by this time in connection with advances made in metallurgy. The ancient Indians were renowned for their steel smelting, their skills in preparing fast dyes, working fabrics and leather and the production of various drugs. The use of mercury is mentioned in a number of treatises. In the fifth century the first scientific treatises in the fields of chemistry and alchemy appeared. Some of these are traditionally attributed to the outstanding philosopher Nagarjuna.

Medicine also developed apace at this stage, and in particular anatomy. Medical writings of the first centuries A.D. contain detailed descriptions of the human body, expound methods for dissecting corpses and outline the functions of various organs. The human body is presented as a combination of the five principal elements: ether, fire, wind, water and earth, and, according to the ancient Indians, all bodily diseases resulted from changes in the proportions between these elements. Surgical intervention involving various instruments was a known practice by this time. Certain branches of medicine also acquired a separate identity such as pediatrics, neuropathology, pharmacology and otolaryngology. Great attention was devoted

to the identification and the treatment of diseases. Particular importance was attached to water treatments, herbal and dietetic cures.

Medical treatises have survived that were written by Charaka (second century A.D.) and Sushruta (fourth and fifth centuries A.D.). These texts include references to such complex operations as craniotomy, amputations of arms and legs and the removal of cataracts.

## Architecture

The Kushana and Gupta periods were marked by new developments in both secular and religious architecture. In about the year 150 B.C. a magnificent series of caves was built in Karle (near Bombay). The shrine or *chaitya* at this site—India's largest cave-temple—is approximately 38 metres long, over 14 metres wide and almost 14 metres high. In the hall there are two rows of columns, a *stupa* and many different stone sculptures. The light falls through special apertures with wooden ribs. Many figures in relief are carved into the façade: apart from that of the Buddha there are also statues of those who endowed the temple. The whole enormous complex was cut into the rock and it is striking in its magnificence. In the Gupta period cave architecture was developed further: a particularly striking example is provided by the cave-temples at Ajanta. The temples of that period usually had façades richly ornamented with sculptured figures.

Most of the religious and secular buildings of note during that period were built in wood, which accounts for the fact that they have not survived. However, all the stone buildings which survived from the Gupta period testify to high standards of architecture. One of the most ancient Hindu temples above ground is at Sanchi and dates from the fifth century A.D. The columns of the portico bear capitals decorated with figures of lions which resemble those of the famous lion capital on Ashoka's Pillar. The temple at Sanchi was built with reference to the finest traditions of Indian architecture.

A still earlier building was the small Buddhist temple at Nalanda (fourth century A.D.), the foundations of which have survived to this day. At Nalanda there was an enormous university complex attended by over 10,000 students, apart from numerous buildings designated for worship and ordinary houses.

In the fourth century A.D. work began on an enormous Buddhist temple at Bodh Gaya. Its main tower was 55 metres high, and this made it one of the highest Buddhist temples in the whole of Asia. Large Buddhist monasteries were also being built in North-Western India. As early as the second century A.D. work began on the Dharmarajika Monastery in Taxila and a whole complex of halls and subsidiary buildings had been completed by the fifth century A.D.

Excavations of the many layers to be found at the sites of ancient settlements have revealed remains of secular buildings dating from the early centuries A.D. The sculptures on the *stupas* in Sanchi and Amaravati give us an idea of these buildings: the houses of the period had several storeys and the royal palaces were of dazzling splendour.

### The Fine Arts

In the Kushana age a number of schools grew up in the world of fine arts and particularly in sculpture.

In Central Asia the local Bactrian school flourished; its work showed marked secular traits; in North-Western India there was the Gandhara school, in the Ganges valley, the Mathura school, and that of Amaravati in the Andhra.

A variety of outside influences can be discerned in Gandhara sculpture—Greek, Roman, Central Asian and it also has a strong Buddhist flavour. Some scholars suggested that sculptures of the Gandhara school were the work of Hellenised Indians, while others even held that they were the work of Roman craftsmen. Although the Western influence is indeed conspicuous here, the main source of inspiration for these sculptures came from local traditions. Buddha depicted in the image of man appears very early in Gandhara sculpture. Prior to this Buddha had been depicted by means of various symbols: a wheel (*chakra*), a throne, the Bodhi tree, etc. It is possible that this was the result of the influence of Mahayana ideas.

In some statues of Buddha and the bodhisattvas scholars point to what they see as the unmistakable influence of Apollo of the Belvedere, but many features of the Buddha as depicted by this school were based on purely local traditions. The material used was different and also the purposes for which sculpture was used. As a rule in India sculptures were an integral part of a particular building or other. The subjects were Indian but there is no doubt that many of the techniques used were Greek in inspiration. In the words of certain art historians a Gandhara sculptor had an Indian heart and Greek hands. Gandhara traditions in the world of sculpture exerted a major influence over fine arts in many countries of Central Asia and the Far East.

The Mathura school was highly original: as well as Buddhist sculptures a considerable proportion of the works produced were on secular themes; figures of Kushana rulers appear and also laymen—rich patrons of temples or monasteries. Here we find a regular portrait gallery. In the Mathura school the predominant influence to be felt is that of ancient Jaina or Mauryan sculpture. Worthy of note is the fact that in Mathura (it would appear, independently of the Gandhara school) anthropomorphic representations of the Buddha appear, perhaps even somewhat earlier than in



the North-Western part of the country. The figures of Buddha from Mathura create an earthly image of the preacher, but hints of a certain aloofness already make themselves felt at this stage.

In Amaravati sculpture provides as it were the complement to the Buddhist *stupa* built in the second century A.D. Scenes dealing in the main with the life of Buddha are depicted, but the whole tone of the sculptures is strictly local, conveying the specific principles underlying the artistic canon of that particular school. The influence of the artistic traditions of the North also makes itself felt.

In the Gupta age it is already more difficult to trace specific, distinctive characteristics of the various trends in art. A more homogeneous tradition in sculpture starts to grow up and this is based mainly on the traditions of the North Indian school in Mathura. The Buddhist interpretation of the image of Buddha is elaborated in more detail and a further stage is to be observed in the evolution of the representation of the human aspect of the teacher and preacher, who is now depicted as the supreme deified being.

In the later Gupta age the canons of Buddhist sculpture changed somewhat as a result of the decline of Buddhism; Buddha acquired uniform canonical and stylistic features, and sculptured portraits found in various parts of the country resemble each other closely. Good examples of these are the fifth-century statues of Buddha in Sultanganj (Bihar) and Sarnath (near Benares). The first figure, made of brass, was of a fairly impressive size—over two metres high and weighing close on a ton. Buddha is here already portrayed as the embodiment of divine power. He has a broad torso and narrow waist, and hardly perceptible muscles. The whole figure is executed in a special style: the head is slightly inclined, and the right arm is bent at the elbow in the “abhaya-mudra” pose. The figure of the preacher is conspicuously idealised: the pose is natural and unconstrained, conveying an impression of inner concentration, the face wears a blissful smile.

The resurgence of Hinduism also exerted a direct influence on Indian sculpture: sculptures of Vaishnavite and Shaivite gods became widespread. The majority of Hindu sculptures dating from the Gupta age depict Shiva. It is possible that the representation of Buddha as a man (characteristic of Buddhist sculpture during the early centuries A.D.) influenced the manner in which Hindu deities were depicted.

However the Hindus regarded the figures of their gods, even when lent a human countenance, as symbols, and for this reason they might well have several hands, each of which would symbolically be associated with a specific deity or the functions carried out by the latter.

Apart from strictly religious works, so-called semi-secular and secular sculpture also made definite advances in the Gupta period.

This age marked an important stage in the development of ancient Indian painting. The famous frescoes of Ajanta (in the present-day

state of Maharashtra),\* are true masterpieces of Indian and world art. As far as the technicalities of their execution were concerned these were not frescoes in the strict sense of the word. The paintings covered the walls and ceilings of twenty-nine caves. A wide variety of subjects was used: there were scenes from the life of the Buddha, illustrations of *jatakas*, portraits of the Buddha, figures of *yakshini*, various patterns, etc. Nature is magnificently depicted, as well as various scenes of everyday life, and scenes from the court. After visiting the Ajanta caves in the seventh century Hsuan Tsang wrote that "all that is great and all that is small" was depicted on the walls of the temple. The colours used are also remarkable, conveying as they do almost every available hue. The paintings were made on a dry surface.

Work started on the Ajanta frescoes before the Gupta period and they took several centuries to complete. The influence of these paintings not only on Indian culture but also on that of a number of other Eastern countries was truly enormous.

#### THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL LINKS BETWEEN ANCIENT INDIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES

Even in its earliest history India maintained close links with many foreign countries. Over the centuries these contacts were developed and consolidated; Indian culture penetrated other ethno-cultural zones and a process of mutual cultural enrichment ensued.

The earliest and closest of these cultural ties were those linking India and Iran, for these can be traced as far back as Neolithic times. The ancient Indians and Iranians were closely related peoples both ethnically and linguistically. The period of particularly close Indo-Iranian ties began after the formation of the Achaemenid Empire, when certain areas of North-Western India became part of that empire. Achaemenid culture (architecture, sculpture) also influenced the development of Indian culture during the Mauryan age. Buddhism spread to Iran from India, and many Indian scientific achievements and works of art became known there.

Recent excavations made by Soviet archeologists in Central Asia show that there existed direct links between the southern parts of Central Asia and India as early as the Harappan age, but these became particularly intensive in the Kushana period. Central Asian influences made themselves felt in India after penetration by the Kushanas and the Shakas, while Buddhism spread to Central Asia and also knowledge of many of India's cultural achievements.

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\* The Ajanta region was not incorporated into the Gupta empire, but appears to have been part of the Vakataka state, as indicated in inscriptions found locally.

Judging by inscriptions found in Central Asia, Indians had already established settlements there during the Kushana and Gupta periods, and had built large monasteries. The most striking demonstration of this is provided by the Buddhist monasteries at Kara-Tepeh (near Termez in the first centuries A.D.) and in Ajina-Tepeh (Southern Tajikistan, seventh century A.D.). Written evidence of direct links with India have also been found in Central Asia—Buddhist manuscripts written on birch-bark and palm leaves.

In the first centuries A.D. trade links between India and China grew apace; these were effected by way of the Great Silk Route and also by sea. Indian embassies and Buddhist missions were sent to China. In the third century A.D. large Buddhist monasteries appeared in China, and translations of Buddhist writings into Chinese were also made.

During the same period Indian colonies were being set up in Central Asia; there is ample evidence of this in documents surviving in Kharoṣṭhi script.

Links between India and Sri Lanka were established immediately after the first Indo-Aryan settlers came to the island. Under the Mauryan kings, when Buddhism first began to spread to the island, cultural ties became much closer. Indian culture exerted a strong influence over Singhalese literature, architecture and religion. At a very early stage India began trading with many countries of South-East Asia, and later Indian settlements appeared in some of these. The settlers brought with them the Sanskrit language and also many achievements of Indian culture. In the early centuries A.D. Indian communities also appeared in Indonesia.

At the time of the Harappan civilisation trade and cultural links were established with the Sumerians. Later the Indians engaged in overseas trade with Arabia and Africa and consolidated links with countries bordering the Mediterranean, including Egypt.

A new era in relations between India and the West began after Alexander the Great's campaign, when the Greeks acquainted themselves at first hand with India, its peoples and traditions. During the Kushana period ties between India and Rome grew stronger; Indian embassies bearing rich gifts were sent to Rome and Romans set up trading stations in Southern India.

The influence of ancient Greece and Rome made itself felt particularly clearly when Indo-Greek states were being set up in North-Western India, and then later in the Kushana period. It was reflected in the art of the period (Gandhara sculpture), in science and philosophy. Certain Indian astronomical treatises dating from the early centuries A.D. indicate that Indian scholars were acquainted with the work of Alexandrian astronomers; one of the *siddhantas* (astronomical treatises) came to be known as the *Romaka-siddhanta* (the Roman *siddhanta*).

Not long ago the manuscript of an astrological poem *Yavana-Jataka* (Greek Tale) was unearthed: it was compiled in the third

century on the basis of an older text translated from the Greek original. This find points clearly to the familiarity of Indian scholars with the achievements of classical scholars.

Despite these contacts with ancient Greece and Rome the influence of these cultures on India is not substantial. This influence usually extended not farther than the higher strata of society and was confined to the North-West and the West coast. At the same time Indian cultural influences started to make themselves felt in Western science, philosophy and culture.

It is known for example that Indian medicines were used in the classical world. Some scholars contend that the influence of the ideas of the *Upanishads* can be detected in Pythagoras' work and that of his followers, and maintain that the influence of ancient Indian philosophy can also be observed in the work of the neo-Platonists, etc.

However it is important to stress another angle, the analogous development of philosophical knowledge in both centres of ancient civilisation. Many crucial questions concerning the universe, man and Nature were posed and solved in similar ways by both Indian and classical thinkers. This phenomenon points to the underlying pattern of cultural advance shaped by the processes of historical development in the ancient period. While maintaining and consolidating close trade and cultural links with foreign lands over many centuries, India preserved its own distinctive culture, philosophy, traditions, social and political conventions.

The traditions of ancient Indian civilisation exerted an enormous influence on the subsequent development of Indian society and that of culture as a whole. The contribution made by ancient India to the rich heritage of world civilisation is truly immense.